

Commentary

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The Republicans



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Israel: Hallucinations of Peace / Fiamma Nirenstein

Computers & Their Discontents / Daniel J. Silver

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American leadership in world affairs is expensive. Until you consider the alternative.

During this century, America has played a proud and unparalleled role in the leadership of formal alliances and informal coalitions to vanquish tyrants, extend human freedom, and craft the rules and institutions of commerce and peace.

The cost of our leadership in world affairs has been high; we honor the profound sacrifices made in the exercise of that leadership. At the same time, we know that, for the realization of our fundamental principles and the welfare of our country, the cost of withdrawal from leadership — or of its assumption by other nations — would have been intolerable. Through two World Wars and five decades of post-War conflict between the Soviet bloc and the Western alliance, America's role had been central and irreplaceable. In the uncertainties and conflicts that lie ahead, we foresee no diminution — indeed, a likely extension — of the call for American leadership in international affairs.

It is in the interest of human progress, and the particular interest of our own nation, that America continue to answer that call to leadership. In fact, America's national and international interests are mutually reinforcing. In the developed world, American commitment to free trade in goods and ideas, and to the entrenchment and protection of democracy, strengthens our and our partners' economies, the well-being of our people, and our political and strategic infrastructures. In the developing world, American commitment to human rights and to the relief of human suffering, to the creation and sustenance of democratic institutions, and to defense against extremism, ultranationalism and expansionism, is not only morally compelling but yields alliances, markets and regional security regimes vital to American economic and political interests.

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906 in part to spur U.S. action against the oppression of Jews in czarist Russia, has consistently advocated our nation's leadership in world affairs. A participant in the Versailles conference of 1919 and consultant to the American delegation to the San Francisco conference that chartered the United Nations in 1945, the American Jewish Committee has long recognized the singular role of the United States as a defender of freedom, protector of human rights, and proponent of peaceful relations between states.

As Americans, inheritors of the world's longest and most successful experiment in constitutional democracy, we know the provenance of our freedoms — the struggle to found a nation free of religious persecution, intolerance and political oppression; we know, as well, that our nation's struggle for freedom is incomplete and ongoing. As Jews, inheritors of an ancient and noble tradition of laws and culture, whose communities in other lands have been decimated by political and religious decree, we cherish the American ideal of liberty, a beacon of hope to all the world.

For these reasons — America's role and investment

in shaping the modern world; the dangers of alternative or absent leadership; the economic, political and strategic benefits of active international engagement with both the developed and developing worlds; and the history, virtue and motivating power of the American ideal — we commend our Government's continued dedication to the projection of American leadership in world affairs. To that end, we urge the following:

■ **Vigorous resistance to neo-isolationist calls for American withdrawal or retreat from international commitments.** American economic, political and strategic interests cannot be isolated or insulated from world affairs; their successful engagement in world affairs are America's guarantor of prosperity and peace.

■ **An understanding of the cost-effectiveness of U.S. foreign aid and a strong commitment to maintain it as an efficient instrument of foreign policy.** Reduced in real-dollar terms in recent budgets to less than 1 percent of Federal spending — and the lowest, as a percentage of GNP, among major industrialized nations — U.S. foreign aid serves to safeguard America's political and economic interests abroad and spurs the development of new markets, generates American jobs (with 3 out of 4 aid dollars spent at home), and helps ease foreign crises that could escalate into instability and military conflict.

■ **Continued U.S. leadership in efforts to resolve regional conflicts in areas of vital economic, political and strategic interest; to bar the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and to combat international terrorism that threatens America, Israel, moderate Arab states, and the values and institutions of modern civilization.** America's role in the pursuit of Arab-Israeli reconciliation, and in the development of regional economic and security arrangements to promote Middle East peace, has been, and continues to be, indispensable.

■ **Continued U.S. leadership, active participation, and appropriate investment in multilateral and bilateral institutions, including international lending agencies, trade and health organizations, and the United Nations.** These institutions are valuable tools through which the United States, with vital security and economic interests across the globe, seeks global consensus on issues of national importance.

■ **The protection of international human rights as an essential component of U.S. foreign policy, reflecting America's deepest values while advancing its interests in a safer world.** Indeed, at the founding conference of the United Nations 50 years ago, it was American Jewish Committee representatives Joseph Proskauer and Jacob Blaustein who argued persuasively that governments which respect human rights in their own countries are less likely to upset regional and global stability.

This message, one of a series on public policy issues, was adopted by the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee at its 89th Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., on May 3, 1995.

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Commentary®

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Letters from Readers

Immigration, Cont'd.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "What To Do About Immigration" [March], Linda Chavez writes that Peter Brimelow and I "believe that national identity must be defined in explicitly racial and ethnic terms." Mr. Brimelow is more than capable of defending himself in an intellectual brawl, with his usually effective right upper-cut ["Letters from Readers," June].

As for myself, since Miss Chavez bases her claim in part on my citation of demographic forecasts that America will have a nonwhite majority by the year 2050, many of your readers will infer that I have defined American identity as an explicitly white one. Not only is this not my view; it is the precise opposite of the view of American identity I have advanced.

In my three articles on this topic, I have used the same, or very similar, formulations: namely, that American national identity is a cultural one developing over time into an American ethnicity that encompasses *all* of the country's existing ethnicities.

Thus, two sentences after my definition of a nation which Miss Chavez quotes, I added: "And because it is more cultural than ethnic, this [American] identity is also more inclusive."

Two sentences after that, I anticipated her point that intermarriage was accelerating assimilation:

The longer that new Americans inhabit the same culture as everyone else, the closer they draw to each other—as the figures for intermarriage indicate.

And in a controversy with Richard John Neuhaus, I wrote:

The American identity defended in my two articles—a cultural identity evolving into an ethnic one—incorporates all America's constituent ethnicities, and the common culture unifying it is enriched from non-Anglo sources.

Surely that settles that.

As to the demographic forecasts of a coming nonwhite majority, Miss Chavez tells me that I can "relax" because culture, not race or ethnicity, is the issue. Her reassurance is kind but needless. Again, in the article from which she quotes, I wrote explicitly that

if . . . black Americans were to become the majority in 2050, . . . we could view this with indifference. A changing ethnic balance resulting from differential ethnic birth rates among people of the same nationality—people profoundly committed to one another in a wider American ethnicity—should not make white Americans feel culturally dispossessed.

The problem with this immigrant-driven demographic change, I went on, was *culture*, because while

some [immigrants] may become so [i.e., American], others, living in a welfare state and with multicultural programs, may remain in some sense alien, retaining languages and cultures separate from those of the American nation.

Again, Q.E.D. surely.

I can only speculate as to why Miss Chavez should have misunderstood the drift of my argument. Was it a case of guilt by association of ideas? To be interested in immigration is perhaps not in itself a hanging offense. But to be interested in immigration *and* national identity, *and* particularly to argue that the latter may be threatening the former—well, Miss Chavez did not pause to think but issued the instructions: "Round up your usual suspicions."

If I did not know Miss Chavez better, I would be afraid she had mistaken me for a stereotype.

JOHN O'SULLIVAN
Editor, *National Review*
New York City

LINDA CHAVEZ writes:

In a *National Review* article last November, John O'Sullivan warned, darkly, that "The forecast of a majority-minority America by 2050 is entirely dependent upon immigration levels." Then, in the next sentence, he complained that today's "immigrants and their children, as we have seen, may not be as American as apple pie in any real sense." Am I wrong to think that Mr. Sullivan is rather deeply concerned about something other than culture here? Immigrants, after all, have never been "as American as apple pie." Yet in the past we have managed to assimilate culturally exotic Russian peasants, Polish Jews, and Chinese laborers quite successfully. Today, rates of

Brain Food.



(Head revived from vegetated state)

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assimilation are probably higher than they were during the last great wave of newcomers.

The only major difference between the immigrants of today and those of yesterday is race and ethnicity. Over 80 percent of current immigration is from countries in Asia and Latin America. True, there are other considerations, such as the rise of the welfare state and of racial and ethnic preferences, but, ultimately, these *are* other considerations, and have nothing to do with immigrants specifically.

I admire much of what Mr. O'Sullivan has to say about American nationhood, but he is clearly making race and ethnicity, rather than cultural assimilation, the issue.

"Agents of Influence"

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

When I last encountered David Pryce-Jones ["Agents of Influence," April] at one of the publisher George Weidenfeld's parties, he upbraided me for the fact that the *Guardian* newspaper, of which I had then recently become the literary editor, had never once reviewed any of his books. I replied that such decisions had not, in the past, been my responsibility. Now, however, after reading his article, I think I can more easily understand why no one had bothered about his writing. As an author of both fiction and nonfiction, he seems wholly unable to distinguish between the two.

As a passing acquaintance of many years ago, and as someone with many friends in common, I might have expected that common courtesy, let alone established journalistic practice, would have led him to pick up the phone to verify some of the wilder allegations made about me in the British press before launching into his own vindictive diatribe. But no. Ace-reporter Pryce-Jones decided to give way to his alter ego as a writer of spy fiction. The two genres, in his paranoid mind, have clearly become confused.

Mr. Pryce-Jones tries to depict me as an archetypal British lefty, "one of the leftist beard-and-sandals brigade immortally caricatured by George Orwell." If only life were so simple. He says, for example, that I had declared myself in 1962 to be an "admirer of Israel, on the ground that it was a genuinely socialist society." Subsequently, he

suggests, I had been convinced by the Six-Day War that "Israel had converted from socialism into a monstrous brand of American-inspired imperialism." I became, it seems, a "supporter of the PLO."

Alas, simply not true. When I lived in Israel in the 1960's, I liked and admired the socialism of the kibbutzim, and indeed I found much the same spirit alive when I visited Castro's Cuba. But I did not care, then or later, for the militarism of Israeli society as a whole. The Six-Day War found me living in South America, and I have never expressed a view about Israel or the Palestinians from that day to this. My interests have lain elsewhere.

Since Mr. Pryce-Jones claims to be an Oxford contemporary, he should know full well that virtually no one of our generation ever had any illusions of any kind about the Communism of the Soviet Union. The attempt to elide the 30's with the 60's is ridiculous in someone with some claim to historical understanding. Many of us came to politics in the aftermath of the Khrushchev speech, the Hungarian uprising, and the Polish October of 1956. Some of us, despairing of resistance or change in Eastern Europe, went on to search for socialist alternatives in the emerging third world. We hoped that a new world might be created that would be different from the model laid down by the Soviet Union or by the United States. Alas, we were sorely disappointed.

Yet even when the cold-war rivalry was at its height, during the campaign against the Vietnam war, few people in Britain were actively in favor of the Vietnamese imposing a Soviet-style society on their country. Most people just campaigned for the Americans to stop the bombing and end the war.

Much of my life has been spent reporting from the third world, an area of the globe where most governments—of every hue—tried to steer a middle path between the blandishments of the United States and the Soviet Union. They tried to devise an independent path and to avoid getting caught up in the military alliances of the cold war. The policy was called "nonalignment." Today, with the collapse of one superpower and the diminution of the nuclear threat, it lies in tatters, and maybe it was always a pipe-dream. But in the circumstances of that time, it was not surprising that I, like many other

journalists, tried to keep in touch with Russians, to hear their side of the story. The idea that such people were recruited as "agents of influence" was, by all accounts, an invention of the latter years of the Brezhnev era, when Soviet bureaucrats were trying to justify their expenses. So I have nothing to apologize for when confronted by self-appointed spokesmen for the prisoners in the gulag, nor do I accept Mr. Pryce-Jones's accusation that I "legitimized an enterprise of mass murder." COMMENTARY describes him as a "British political analyst." That's news to me. I think he should stick to fiction.

RICHARD GOTT

London, England

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

David Pryce-Jones touches on the problem of comparative evil. He points out that Nazi agents of influence have been required to answer for their behavior, and have been (rightly) condemned for attempting to legitimize a murderous enterprise. But this is not happening with Communist agents of influence. . . .

I was puzzled about this until one of my Left-liberal friends pointed out the difference. Unlike Nazi agents of influence, Communist agents of influence, I was told, were supporting a system intent on doing good. How comforting to know that millions of kulaks and small-property owners in Communist states were liquidated in a glorious attempt to do good. . . .

ALAN D. WHITE

Berkeley Heights, New Jersey

DAVID PRYCE-JONES writes:

When first exposed for accepting money from the KGB, Richard Gott sought to laugh it away as an amusing spinoff from, in his words, "the cloak-and-dagger atmosphere which will be familiar to anyone who has read the spy stories of the cold war."

His career, he now invites us to believe, was part of some wider steering of a middle path between "the blandishments of the United States and the Soviet Union," as though there were nothing to choose between democracy and totalitarianism. False moral equivalence of just this sort was always central to fellow-traveling. The middle path for him, Mr. Gott further informs us, consisted in searching for socialist alternatives in the emerging third world. In

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practice this meant espousing Maoism and other terror-based derivatives of Communism.

It is incomplete—to be kind about it—to describe taking KGB money as keeping in touch with Russians “to hear their side of the story.” In taking KGB money, Mr. Gott was succumbing to Soviet blandishments, placing himself outright on the Soviet side. That is how he contributed his measure to the legitimization of an enterprise of mass murder.

There are no such people as “self-appointed spokesmen for the prisoners in the gulag.” Intended as a put-down, that phrase starkly reveals the inner man. Every human being has the duty to speak up for such victims, and to shun and attack their persecutors. Mr. Gott evidently has no sense of the enormity of what he has done.

I am indeed a novelist, but readers will easily decide which one of us is a writer of spy stories, paranoid, and unable to distinguish fact from fiction.

Liberalism

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:
Whatever the merits of David Brooks's analysis of a crisis in

“liberalism” [“What's Left of Liberalism,” May], his description of the *New Republic* is, in all respects, ludicrous. Let me take each of his claims in turn.

“A liberalism that has drifted into frivolity.” The premise here—that the *New Republic* sees itself still as the intellectual guardian of “liberalism”—is simply wrong. I know Mr. Brooks has been out of the country for a few years, so maybe he missed the countless interviews I gave in which I was clear that, from the beginning of my editorship, I wanted to make the *New Republic* a forum for a variety of voices, from all sides. I explicitly disavowed loyalty to any particular party or creed. The term I used, for want of anything better, was “post-ideological.” My preference has been especially for voices that freshly rethink public issues in ways that do not conform to the exhausted Left-Right, liberal-conservative paradigm. Mr. Brooks is still wedded to the paradigm—as is COMMENTARY, of course—but he should know that an Oakeshottian like myself has little time for ideological cant, whether of a liberal or conservative character.

“Brings little fervor to the seri-

ous issues of the day.” Well, hardly. Take last year. Two of the most furious debates—over health-care reform and race and IQ—were largely defined by the *New Republic*. Elizabeth McCaughey's articles on Clinton's health-care plan probably had more political impact than any single magazine article in recent memory. The *New Republic's* *Bell Curve* issue, whatever your view of it, hardly lacked fervor. The McCaughey article won a National Magazine Award and the *Bell Curve* issue was turned into a book. Welfare reform? Countless articles, including a passionate post-election cover story by Mickey Kaus—“They Blew It”—which was the apogee of our relentless coverage of the debate. Affirmative action? Three cover stories in six months: “Is Affirmative Action Doomed?” last October; Richard Kahlenberg's definitive case for class-based affirmative action in April; and Jeffrey Rosen's blueprint for change in May.

“Cover-stories on smell (yes, smell), or on chant. . . .” I look back over 1995 and see, yes, an enchanting essay by Richard Klein on smell, and a brilliant review by Katherine Bergeron on the marketing of the sacred. (Did Mr. Brooks read these pieces? I know him well enough to suspect he would love them.) But these two are the only cover stories this year that do not deal with some aspect of public policy or debate. To name a few of the other subjects covered: the anti-immigration backlash, the blather of Cornel West, a manifesto for a new nationalism, the war crimes of Milosevic, and the growing possibility of random terrorism—a week before the Oklahoma bombing. Any objective reader would see that these topics are the rule—and occasional cultural subjects the exception. But again, a nonideological perspective would naturally mix some culture with politics. To those of us not rigidly ideological, there are more things in life than politics, and a magazine should reflect many aspects of life. Maybe Mr. Brooks lacks a sense of smell, or is bored by religion. On both counts, I plead the opposite.

“Pays loyalty to no larger cause.” It seems to me this depends on what you mean by the phrase “larger cause.” If you mean by it the avoidance of genocide in Europe, the reform of welfare at home, the maintenance of a strong



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internationalism abroad, the balancing of the budget, the moderation of judicial activism, the security of the state of Israel, civil rights for minorities, the reform of a bloated federal government, a scaling back of affirmative action, among other causes, then the *New Republic* qualifies. If you mean the even larger cause of freedom of speech and debate, open and honest interaction of varying opinions, then the *New Republic* qualifies as well.

But if you mean by "larger cause" the adherence to an ideology, a uniform voice on any subject, a thoroughly predictable translation of all life's problems into political problems, then we are proud to be excluded from such a larger cause. It may make a more effective political party, but we're not a political party; we're a magazine.

Besides, if you wanted to read an ideological tract, you could read the *Nation*. Or COMMENTARY. To me, they already read like documents from an earlier era.

ANDREW SULLIVAN
Editor, *New Republic*
Washington, D.C.

DAVID BROOKS writes:

"We're not a political party; we're a magazine," says Andrew Sullivan. Well, *Teen Beat* is a magazine, the *New Republic* was once something more: for three-quarters of a century it served as the voice of American liberalism, and it did so precisely because it had a point of view. Under the editorship of Michael Kinsley in the 80's, the magazine interestingly stretched the boundaries of liberalism—even supporting aid to the *contras*—yet remained in the liberal camp. But now Mr. Sullivan tells us that the *New Republic* is no longer the "intellectual guardian of liberalism"; he does not want it to "conform to the exhausted Left-Right, liberal-conservative paradigm."

Being an "Oakeshottian who has no time for ideological cant," Mr. Sullivan has no doubt arrived at this position by a properly elevated route. And so it must be purely an accident that this sentiment happens to echo that of many establishment liberals who, having seen liberalism defined and redefined almost out of existence, also find it convenient to claim that the world has now moved beyond Left and Right. But though they claim to be beyond ideology, liberals still

seem to spend all their time thinking about it.

The main problem, however, with editing a post-ideological magazine is that the world remains stubbornly ideological. The Clinton administration, for example, which tried to get its major legislation passed without Republican support, is not post-ideological, though it sometimes pretends to be. And of course congressional Republicans, fiercely united against liberalism, are certainly not post-ideological. Anyway, for people who think of themselves as post-ideological it should not be enough to move beyond Left and Right; it is necessary to replace them with something.

Mr. Sullivan presents a list of *New Republic* articles he is proud of. I thought some of the pieces he mentions were weak, some wonderful. But they are separate items in a smorgasbord of differing opinions. As one who has dined at this

particular establishment for many years, I cannot help noticing that as the fare grows ever more spicy and diverse (to include even post-ideological reappraisals of pedophilia, as in Hanna Rosin's "Washington Diarist" of May 8, 1995), the meal satisfies less and less.

The Arts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "What To Do About the Arts" [April], Joseph Epstein covers a wide range of topics. . . . But above all, he laments the sorry record of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). During the Reagan and Bush years, Mr. Epstein sternly writes, NEA panel members happily approved creations guaranteed to affront us.

All true. And nothing that we did not know before his peroration. What is missing from his article, however, is an answer to the question, what have painters,

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sculptors, and musicians of conservative persuasion been doing since 1965, when the NEA was founded?

Evidently not much worth writing about. Consider that, after attacking wretches whose outputs they hold in contempt, spokesmen for what is right, reasonable, and useful in the arts, including Mr. Epstein, cannot even name any composers, painters, and sculptors they consider worthy.

So the problem might not be one of liberal or conservative val-

ues, approval or disapproval of middle-class institutions, or of how art has been politicized. Art has *always* been politicized, and the works of every period reflect the tastes and standards of the period's patrons. (Recall that when asked why he never composed a string quintet, Haydn is said to have responded, "Because no one ever paid me to.")

The problem as we approach the end of the 20th century is less an inept NEA than the breakdown of

the society in which we live. Creative types, like the rest of us, have tended to notice that greed, opportunism, and lack of talent characterize not only NEA panels and faculties at universities, but politicians, editors at periodicals, and patrons of the arts. . . .

Without exception, managers of symphony orchestras prefer almost any year in their history to 1995; today, they are hard put to figure out what their ensembles are here to accomplish. As far as painting and sculpture are concerned, consider recent exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney: in comparison, even Soviet realism can look good.

MILTON GOLDIN

Tarrytown, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Obsessed with the contemporary movements he repeatedly refers to in his article, Joseph Epstein is bewildered by the living world of his time. Little wonder that he is more concerned about art that will achieve museum status or be included in the canon compiled by a future Harold Bloom than about art that works now to keep us civilized as we struggle with "environmentalism, sexual liberation, a lingering anti-capitalism, and an inchoate but determined multiculturalism," as he puts it.

Mr. Epstein's assumption that this is an age of mediocrity is narrow—rather than high-minded. Art today is composed of many elements, including those from cultures other than the Anglo or European-turned-American. This confluence of traditions confuses Mr. Epstein, who is forced to improvise in the face of creativity that goes beyond pure aesthetics. The Epstein cultural barometer has markings for high-, low-, and middlebrow, but gives no indication of qualities beyond the author's political bias.

Snide remarks about the "tender liberal conscience" or the silly "eat-your-arts" refrain are as mediocre in the context of the article as any of the art referred to. Mediocrity is not original to the United States in the late 20th century. It has never been a terminal disease for art before and will not be one now. . . .

Like more primitive critics of the NEA, Mr. Epstein restricts his references to state-funded artists to the sensational few. Our opportunist Representatives and Senators in Washington suffer from the same

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astigmatism that allows them to see only sensation. Karen Finley, whose performances address the reality of abuse, happens to be a much sounder moralist than the North Carolina Senator who is always among the first to lead the charge of the philistines. . . .

No system can guarantee quality, any more than critics are capable of identifying it. At best, we should do what we can to assist honest efforts and make them available to audiences who are prepared to risk some of their precious time by trying out the unknown.

Mr. Epstein should not underestimate the cultural heritage of the United States. . . . It deserves the same degree of public support that European governments provide their artists; and it could even be argued that it needs more support to make up for the damage inflicted by an effete and isolated body of critics and political reactionaries.

DAVID CHORLTON
Phoenix, Arizona

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

When Joseph Epstein writes that "serious art is . . . thoroughly meritocratic and, in the best sense, elitist," the statement rings so utterly true as to bear repeating simply for the sake of repetition. The difficult and demanding critical standards by which such art must be created and appreciated are implied, as is the rigorous educational process, formal or otherwise, required to comprehend, assimilate, and articulate those standards. Once it is understood, the elite, exalted status of the finest art is the source of its great value: its power to elevate human consciousness.

Although no other idea expressed in the article is as important as the preceding, almost every additional point is worth making and is well made. In outlining a largely positive prescription for our culture, however, Mr. Epstein reveals . . . a problem of his own. Whatever it suggests about our country and our century, the last truly important and constructive movement in the visual arts was Post-Impressionism. Abstract Expressionism was aesthetically interesting but artistically insignificant. Similarly, Clement Greenberg was an astute critic who relied on and promulgated a corrupt philosophy of art. Mr. Epstein's admirable in-

tentions deserve a stronger and more enduring foundation than Greenberg is able to provide. . . .

HARVEY GORDON
Kalamazoo, Michigan

JOSEPH EPSTEIN writes:

I hope Milton Goldin will forgive me if I continue to withhold names of conservative artists. I do so chiefly because they would probably resist the label, and quite rightly so. But their numbers are not few. They may be discovered through the absence of the blatantly propagandistic element in their work. The chief point of my article was to make plain that such artists, those who eschew the self-evidently and self-righteously political, are least likely to find favor at the National Endowment for the Arts, at any rate as it is currently organized and as its panels have in recent years been constituted.

David Chorlton ought to take the assemblage of platitudes that comprise his letter, find the appropriate slides for it, set the whole thing to music, read it with his clothes off, and apply for a grant from the NEA under the category: Inter-Arts, multimedia division. I don't see how he could lose.

Fatherhood

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I am grateful to Chester E. Finn, Jr. for his generous and insightful review of my book, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* [Books in Review, April]. But may I quarrel with him on one issue—not just to defend my book or the National Fatherhood Initiative, but to clarify what I believe is an important and much misunderstood point?

Mr. Finn does not like my recommendations for strengthening fatherhood. Here, it seems, at the end of an "otherwise excellent book," I suddenly "pull my punches," offering "pretty pallid stuff" that is "bland and almost comically lacking in force." To Mr. Finn, the what-should-be-done section of the book "faintly resembles a 'Just Say No' poster on the wall of a crack house."

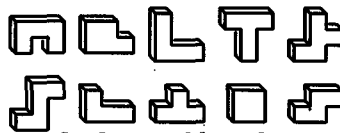
Well now. What is Mr. Finn looking for? If I decided to "get truly serious about fatherlessness," as he puts it, and stop serving up pretty pallid stuff, what would I be serving? To his credit, Mr. Finn has an answer. He wants welfare reform.

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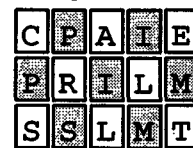


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Even more, he wants new laws that would make it harder to get divorced. More generally, he wants a public-policy agenda—a big, important-sounding list of things for Congress and state legislatures to do.

The core recommendation in my book is that we recommit ourselves in the United States to what I call the fatherhood idea, or what anthropologists call the legitimacy principle: for every child, a legally and morally responsible adult male. In a society where 40 percent of our children do not live with their fathers, few ideas, I submit, could be more radical than this one. Embracing the fatherhood idea would require a fundamental shift in cultural values and in parental behavior, especially regarding marriage.

Is such a cultural transformation possible? I do not know. But I am quite certain that we will never transform our culture in favor of married fatherhood by relying solely, or even largely, upon a public-policy agenda. For the essential challenge we face is not political but cultural. Legislation did not get us into this mess, and legislation will not get us out. Many smart people who study and shape pub-

lic policy, and who tend therefore to act as if the world begins and ends with policy agendas, have a very hard time grasping this point.

Yes, public policy is a part of culture and can affect culture. So, by all means, let us get rid of the current welfare system and let us change divorce laws to give more respect and power to the spouse who does not want the divorce. In my book, I endorse the former idea and should have been more explicit about endorsing the latter. But we are kidding ourselves—we are serving up pretty pallid stuff—if we pretend that any clever list of public-policy ideas can drive or substitute for the much larger and more difficult project of cultural change.

The specific ideas in my book—such as a grass-roots “fatherhood movement” spearheaded by civic and religious leaders; an annual White House report on the state of fatherhood; new public-housing regulations favoring married couples; an interfaith council of religious leaders dedicated to strengthening marriage; community-organized pilot projects aimed at reversing the trend of fatherlessness in specific neighborhoods; city and county “vision statements” in favor of increasing the number

of children who grow up with their two married parents; prohibiting the use of sperm banks by unmarried women; a public-service advertising campaign using sports stars to emphasize the importance of fatherhood; and a commitment by some well-respected scholars to write better school textbooks on marriage and family life—represent my attempt to identify some possible sites for cultural argument and some possible levers for cultural change.

Through my work with the National Fatherhood Initiative and the Institute for American Values, I am now involved in actually putting into practice a number of these ideas. I say in the book that they are primarily illustrations of how we might begin to recommit ourselves to the fatherhood idea. By themselves, they are necessarily speculative and inadequate; I hope that others will come up with more and better ideas. But the main point is to realize where our true challenge lies, and to get busy, rather than wait for politicians and policy analysts to do our work for us.

DAVID BLANKENHORN
Institute for American Values
New York City

CHESTER E. FINN, JR. writes:

David Blankenhorn writes good letters as well as good books. I surely wish him well with his Sisyphean effort to foster “fundamental cultural transformation.” More than wishing him well, I am glad to help. So, I warrant, are many readers of this magazine. Indeed, discussions such as this may even help a bit with that daunting endeavor.

But changes in the culture and changes in our public policies can and probably should go hand in hand. And today I suspect—perhaps this is the erroneous view of a long-time Washingtonian—that we have a better shot at changing some policies during this lifetime than we do at changing the underlying cultural assumptions. For example, one way to stigmatize fathers who abandon their children—Mr. Blankenhorn’s way—is to write and preach and teach about their irresponsibility, get talk-show hosts jawboning about the topic, and get people to take pledges, join clubs, etc. Another way is by changing tax codes, welfare programs, divorce laws, and suchlike to create tangible incentives and disincentives. I am not saying that runaway fathers should

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be executed. But suppose they had to pay a whopping fine which went into, say, the "fund for high-quality orphanages"? And suppose that fine were built into divorce laws and tax codes? Perhaps that one is a bad idea, but not all such ideas ought to be dismissed.

I am not suggesting that the nation view its millions of fatherless children as primarily a public-policy problem. What William Kristol terms the "sociology of virtue" is chiefly to be sought outside the arenas of politics and government. In that regard, Mr. Blankenhorn is right: the nub of the problem of fatherlessness is to be found in our values and our culture. (And not just ours, I recently visited Chile for the first time, and I expected to see a fairly traditional Catholic society. I was told, however, that about 30 percent of Chilean babies nowadays are born to single mothers.) If we can figure out constructive steps to take in those domains, so much the better. Perhaps Mr. Blankenhorn's "pretty pallid" recommendations will even do a bit of good.

But I believe we must also explore the public-policy possibilities at local, state, and national levels. To a great extent, today's policies mirror today's cultural values. If politicians can be persuaded to move out front and change some key policies in anticipation that the culture will (slowly) follow, they should surely do so. That is what finally seems to be happening with respect to the federal budget. Why not with respect to something even more serious?

Pauline Kael

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I wish to respond to Daniel J. Silver's article on Pauline Kael ["She Lost It at the Movies," April]. While I am no uncritical admirer of Kael's criticism, Mr. Silver's turning her into a champion of the 1960's counterculture is not convincing.

It would never occur to me, for instance, to associate Kael's advocacy of what Mr. Silver calls "simple aesthetic delights" with the counterculture. Indeed, I would think this criterion particularly anathema to the avant-garde filmmakers of the era. But then, Kael's impatience with the Left and the ethos of the counterculture is everywhere to be found in *For Keeps*. I will cite just one example. Her 1971 put-down of Alexandro

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The Importance of Territory. Many believe that in this age of missiles, territory is of little importance. But this is not the case. The Arab states have acquired over \$50 billion of the most advanced armaments since the end of the Gulf War. And those are not just "conventional" weapons—

enormous quantities of tanks, aircraft and much more. The Arab states possess large arsenals of chemical and biological weapons, and all of them work feverishly on the development of their nuclear potential.

All of those weapons have only one single target and one single purpose: the destruction of the state of Israel. And that goal is not being cancelled for any agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

For both "conventional" war and for war of mass destruction, territory and topography are critical for self-defense and deterrence. The mountainous territory of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") is

an indispensable line of defense. It totally controls access to Israel's heartland from the east. Israel needs this high ground for defense and to be able to peer deeply into enemy territory. The high ground allows Israel to detect missiles while they are still in the launch stage and to destroy them.

Would the "West Bank" be demilitarized? Even those who want Israel to retreat to her pre-1967 borders are agreed that the evacuated areas must be demilitarized. But that would be useless. Because the Palestinians will have thousands of trained soldiers, camouflaged as their police force. In case of war against Israel, these troops could be helicoptered in minutes to their positions, with armored forces reaching them within the same night. In any case, it is highly doubtful that the surrounding hostile

"Without Judea/Samaria (the 'West Bank') Israel would be totally indefensible; therefore, neither the purposes of Israel nor those of the United States are served by Israel's relinquishing control over the 'West Bank'."

Arab nations would allow such a military vacuum to exist. And finally, there is the matter of terrorism. There are over fifteen

Palestinian Arab terror organizations that neither Yassir Arafat nor any other Palestinian authority can control. There would be a constant rain of Katyusha rockets launched into the Tel Aviv area and into the entire coastal plain, which contains 80% of Israel's population and of its industrial and military potential. Ben Gurion airport, every incoming and outgoing flight, would be subject to mortar fire or shoulder-held Stinger attack. Does anybody doubt that the Arabs would not exploit that irresistible opportunity?

Without the "West Bank" Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the professional opinion of over 100 U.S. generals and admirals. Israel's strong defensive posture makes it most inadvisable for Israel's enemies to attack her. But once this defensive strength is removed, a coordinated war against Israel can only be a matter of time. The example and fate of Czechoslovakia, which preparatory to the Second World War was dismantled and shorn of its defensive capacity, insistently come to mind. What does all this mean to the United States? In a part of the world in which our country has the most far-reaching geopolitical stakes, Israel is the guarantor of American interests in the area. With Israel in a position of weakness the role of the United States in the area would collapse and radical states such as Syria, Iraq and Iran would dominate. That is why, despite the heady prospect of "peace in our time", neither the purposes of Israel nor those of the United States are served by Israel's relinquishing control over the "West Bank".

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Jodorowsky's nihilistic *El Topo* is hardly the work of a critic who flirts "with nihilism," to use Mr. Silver's words, much less someone who esteems the counterculture. The review is peppered with stabs at the pot-heads who raced to the theaters to see *El Topo* in the early 1970's and proceeded to declare the Chilean filmmaker (he is actually of Russian-Jewish descent) a prophet. The movie's countless butcherings, mutilations, and castrations of cripples, dwarfs, and the legless and armless (real deformed people, as Kael reminds us, who display their stumps)—not to mention the footage of every imaginable act of fetishism and perversion—is as redolent of the counterculture as a movie can be, yet Kael condemns the film in no uncertain terms: "The counterculture is buying mystical violence," she writes in her review, and "the violence [in *El Topo*] is what blows [the pot-heads'] minds."

Kael's review of *El Topo* also raises another question prompted by Mr. Silver's review: if she extols violence as much as Mr. Silver claims, why does she despise *El Topo*, which—whatever else it may be—is the greatest "death romp" (Kael's words) ever made. Violence is embraced by filmmakers of every political stripe, and would thus seem to be politically neutral.

ROBERT RICHMAN

New Criterion
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

... Daniel J. Silver arrives at the erroneous conclusion that Pauline Kael has helped to shape the sensibility of a generation for the worse. On the contrary, she is one of the best critics this country has ever produced. . . .

With so much wonderful material to evaluate, Mr. Silver has to resort to nitpicking to prove his dubious agenda. He begins by attacking Kael's views on violence, citing her landmark essay on *Bonnie and Clyde*, but he totally misses the point. The movie is not a celebration of violence or an act of condescension, . . . it is a brilliant look at violence, celebrity, and the public's ambivalence toward both. And it does, as Kael observes, "put the sting back into death."

Mr. Silver seems surprised that Kael does not like a piece of hack work like *Dirty Harry*, but she does not approve of vigilantism. He as-

sumes she does not understand the middle-class frustrations that lead to such actions, but she does understand; she believes, however, that a director should not pander to his audience. Kael thinks graphic violence should be used to reveal meaning, not just to provide cheap excitement. And she does not limit her criticism to conservative points of view but has also blasted such "liberal" movies as *Clockwork Orange* and *Joe*.

Despite Mr. Silver's claims, Kael understands the tensions between Sam Peckinpah's "fascistic" side and his "artistic" one; she just thinks he resolves them better in *The Wild Bunch* . . . than in *Straw Dogs*, a movie which is the equivalent of a glossy, trendy magazine article. . . .

DAN O'NEILL

Los Angeles, California

DANIEL J. SILVER writes:

I am not surprised that Robert Richman finds the idea of Pauline Kael as "champion" of the counterculture unconvincing, but only surprised that he would ascribe this idea to me. No one as independent-minded and, frankly, just plain stubborn as Pauline Kael would ever be a cheerleader for a movement of any kind, let alone one as filled with treacly romanticism (among other, nastier things) as the 60's counterculture. Mr. Richman has apparently misunderstood my argument.

What I wrote was that Kael "was hardly a flower child"—an allusion not just to her maturity at the time she started writing for the *New Yorker* but to elements of her temperament at odds with the spirit of antic hedonism that pervaded the counterculture. I nonetheless pointed out just how many countercultural themes, both lowbrow and highbrow, are reflected in her criticism. She would never have been accepted, much less embraced, by the *New Yorker* readership if she had served up unadulterated paeans to free love, radical agitprop, and eternal youth. What she did instead was to make 60's popcult sensibilities more palatable for middle-class readers, and ended up fostering moral and aesthetic confusions that have contributed to the impoverishment we find in the arts today.

I also agree with Mr. Richman that one can find a number of criticisms of the traditional Left in Kael's writings, but one can also

find, as I noted, many attacks on centrist concerns like fear of crime and rising social disorder, which she characterizes as indicating a "fascist" direction in popular attitudes.

Why Mr. Richman would imply that I argue for Kael's love of violence is beyond me. It is precisely because she professes to hate mindless violence in movies that I called attention to her surprising fondness for the very violent filmmaker, Sam Peckinpah.

In my article I quoted a passage in which Kael rails against the middle-class conformism embodied in Doris Day movies, which she finds to be a baleful influence on our civilization. In the review of *El Topo* cited by Mr. Richman, Kael observes, correctly, that "for the head-movie audiences violence is dissociated from pain. . . . It's the violence that turns them on." But then she adds: "I would not presume to guess whether there are dangers in this; I just don't know enough." Here is a critic who pounces on Doris Day and singing nuns for sapping our spirit but tiptoes around the question of whether inciting youth to violence might harbor "dangers." Perhaps Mr. Richman can reconcile the discrepancy between these two responses with his view of Kael as a tough critic of the counterculture. I cannot.

I am sorry to have offended Dan O'Neill, apparently in my failure to march in lockstep with accepted opinion about Pauline Kael. I do think she is an important critic, and one possessed of certain gifts, as I pointed out in my article. Mr. O'Neill does not leave me much to take issue with, however, since he prefers conclusory pronouncements to argument or demonstration. But perhaps I can at least set the record straight. What I said about Kael's view of *Bonnie and Clyde* was that she attacked the more staid reviews for criticizing the movie's obvious violence. This is not to say that she has an uncritical love of movie violence but that, in her view, the mainstream, middlebrow critics missed the ironies of the film—presumably the same ones Mr. O'Neill celebrates. Her failure to acknowledge the violence in *Bonnie and Clyde* is part and parcel of a self-consciously superior aesthetic attitude which betrays condescension toward ordinary people.

And I was not at all surprised

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that Kael did not like *Dirty Harry*, only that—notwithstanding Mr. O'Neill's views to the contrary—she regarded it as favorably as she did. Also, I suggest that he see the movie again, or at least read a synopsis, because it has nothing to do with vigilantism. Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* is a detective on a police force. The point of the movie, of course, is that the judicial system has betrayed the people it is ostensibly defending. But there was absolutely no acknowledgment of this concern in Pauline Kael's review.

"Mark Twain and the Jews"

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Cynthia Ozick ["Mark Twain and the Jews," May] is certainly correct that Mark Twain's writing on the Jews, even at its most philo-Semitic, was based on the anti-Semitic canards of his day. At the same time, Twain's essay, "Concerning the Jews," contained a valuable lesson for the Jews of his time which is just as significant today. That essay was written in response to letters Twain received from American Jewish readers who were perplexed by the anti-Semitic vio-

lence which had broken out after clashes in the Viennese imperial parliament, and which, as Miss Ozick discusses, was chronicled in Twain's "Stirring Times in Austria." "The show of military force in the Austrian parliament which precipitated the [anti-Jewish] riots was not introduced by any Jew," wrote one of Twain's Jewish readers. And, he continued:

No Jew was a member of that body. No Jewish question was involved in the *Ausgleich* [treaty of confederation between Austria and Hungary] or in the language proposition [whether German or Czech would be Bohemia's official language]. No Jew was insulting anybody. In short, no Jew was doing any mischief toward anybody whatsoever. In fact, the Jews were the only ones of nineteen different races in Austria which did not have a party—they were absolutely non-participants. Yet in your article you say that in the rioting which followed, all classes of people were unanimous only on one thing—viz., being against the Jews.

While Twain was sympathetic to the unfairness of Jewish victimiza-

tion in Vienna, he had little tolerance for professions of helplessness based on lack of organized political power. "Who gives the Jew the right, who gives any race the right, to sit still, in a free country, and let somebody else look after its safety?" For Twain, the fact that Jews numbered 10 percent of the population of the empire and yet had no organized political party to represent their interest was not to their credit. . . .

In America close to 100 years after "Concerning the Jews" was written, Jews have organized themselves politically, following the path of other groups who have banded together to see that their interests are looked after in this democracy. Similarly, Zionism has yielded a Jewish state capable of looking after the political interests of Jews on the world stage. Those who resent the Jews for having finally organized themselves, or those Jews who feel squeamish at the thought of Jewish political power, should listen to the words of Mark Twain. . . .

JON HABER

Avukah Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Cynthia Ozick describes a curious mixture of philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism within the complex person of Mark Twain. Such ambivalence toward Jews is not strange, but what I find odd is, as Miss Ozick points out, that Twain's anti-Semitism stemmed not from the teaching of the church but, rather, from more ancient times. . . . In "Concerning the Jews," Twain wrote:

With precocious wisdom [the Jew] found out in the morning of time that some men worship rank, some worship heroes, some worship power, some worship God, and that over these ideals they dispute and cannot unite—but that they all worship money; so he made it the end and aim of his life to get it. He was at it in Egypt 36 centuries ago; he was at it in Rome . . . ; he has been at it ever since.

No matter that when Twain wrote his essay in 1897 most of the world's Jewish population was living either at or below the poverty line; for him, worship of money was a trait common to all Jews, almost as if greed were a genetic Jewish flaw.

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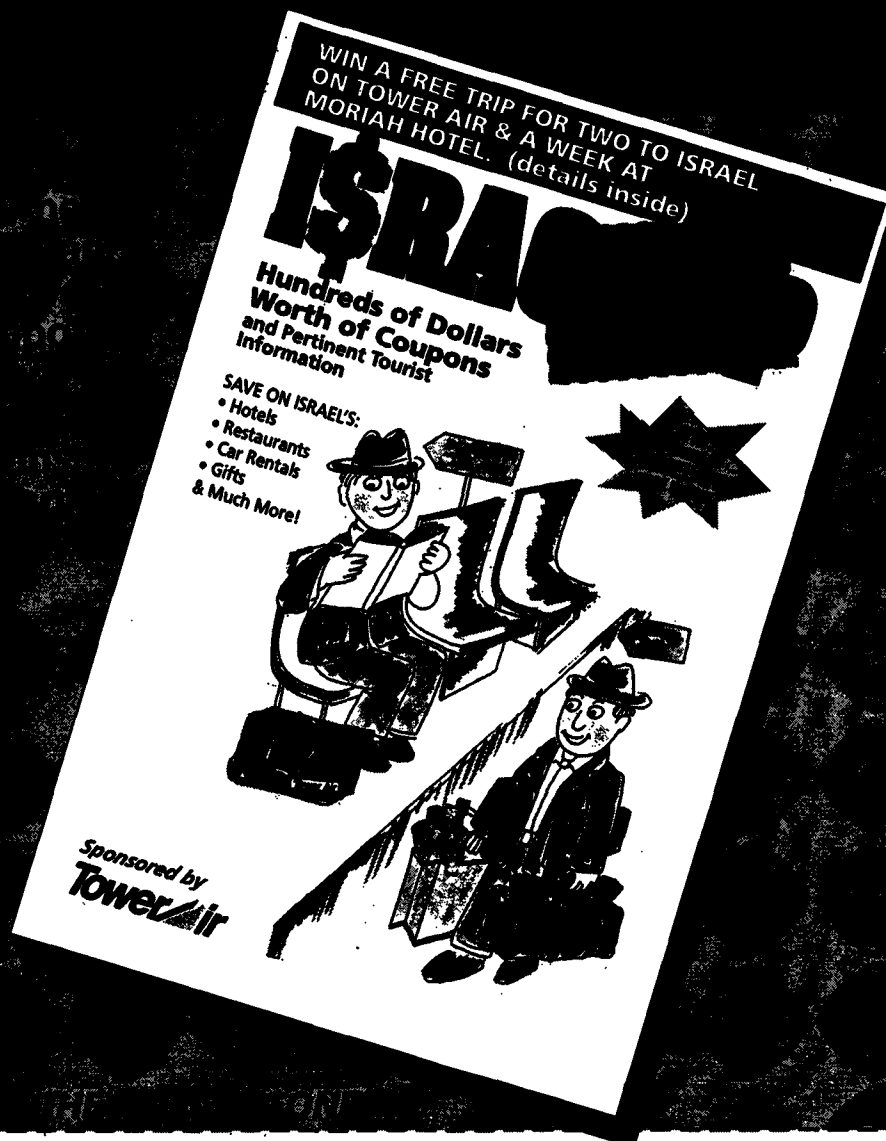
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Palestine and described the barrenness of the country and the poverty of its inhabitants. The Jews whom he saw there were truly a sorry group, but 30 years later, these memories had dimmed, and all he now could see were a people who had bought themselves the envy and enmity of the world. . . .

JUDITH HIRSCH
Boca Raton, Florida

Camille Paglia

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In her review of Camille Paglia's new collection of essays, *Vamps & Tramps*, Elizabeth Kristol [Books in Review, February] hits most of the main points. Yes, Paglia is ludicrously pretentious and self-obsessed; yes, most of her arguments make up in shock value for what they lack in intellectual rigor. And yes, Paglia is not nearly as revolutionary (or "Arien") as she likes to make out.

Miss Kristol, however, gets so caught up in her zeal to trash aspects of Paglia's work that she ignores the one aspect which is extraordinary and deserving of comment: namely, her utter refusal to act, speak, or think consistently.

As Miss Kristol points out, both the Left and the Right are uncomfortable with different aspects of Paglia's theories. It is this rejection of orthodoxy, and of consistency itself, which makes Paglia an intriguing writer. In that way, she is an original.

Whether or not what she writes is any good is another matter entirely.

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN
Geneva, Switzerland

Israel and the Golan

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In the May letters columns, the authors of the Center for Security Policy report, "U.S. Forces on the Golan Heights?" [December 1994], give a conclusive reply to their critic, Michael Eisenstadt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. But one thing should be added. It may seem secondary yet it goes to the root of the dispute, and is a good example of the subtle, even subliminal, pro-Arab propaganda spread around the world by supposedly "honest arbiters" who manage, habitually, to suggest that whatever happens, Israel is in the wrong.

Mr. Eisenstadt writes that "the return of the Golan would eliminate Syria's central grievance vis-à-vis Israel." Syria's grievance? In 1948, to prevent Israel's very birth, Syria (in alliance with six other Arab states) wantonly attacked Israel—from, *inter alia*, the Golan Heights. Israel, woefully lacking in arms, nevertheless came out fighting and (at a cost of 1 percent of its entire population) consolidated its sovereign existence. For nineteen years thereafter, Syria contented itself with attacks, intermittent but frequent, sometimes daily, on the Galilean plain below. Many Israeli children in the area had to attend school in underground bunkers, sheltered against Syrian shells lobbed down from the Golan.

Then in 1967 came a second, no less wanton, all-out Syrian offensive against Israel (in coalition with Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan), with the Golan as its heavily

fortified launching pad. This time Israel fought back onto the Golan Heights, and scaled them (again at a heavy cost in lives).

That is how Israel came to be on those intimidating heights. In 1973, in partnership with Egypt, Syria exploited the sanctity of Yom Kippur to launch yet another attack, which threatened to overwhelm the whole of northern Israel. The attack was repulsed—and *that* is why Israel holds the Golan, which was, and remains, a vital element in its basic defense. . . .

After Syria's Yom Kippur attack, Israel was persuaded (by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger) to withdraw from its forward defenses to new lines. Those (1974) defense lines, however, are still so near Damascus as to make the Syrians think twice and three times before venturing on a *fourth* all-out attack on Israel. Hence we have had peace for over twenty years on that front. But instead of stating simply that Israel's defenses have ensured that peace, Mr. Eisenstadt writes that "Syria has ensured nearly absolute quiet on the Golan for twenty years" (emphasis added). . . .

SHMUEL KATZ
Tel Aviv, Israel

Author's Note

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In my article, "What Moderate Feminists?" [June], I inadvertently failed to credit Nicholas Davidson, author of *The Failure of Feminism*, to whose work I was indebted at several points.

CAROL IANNONE
New York City

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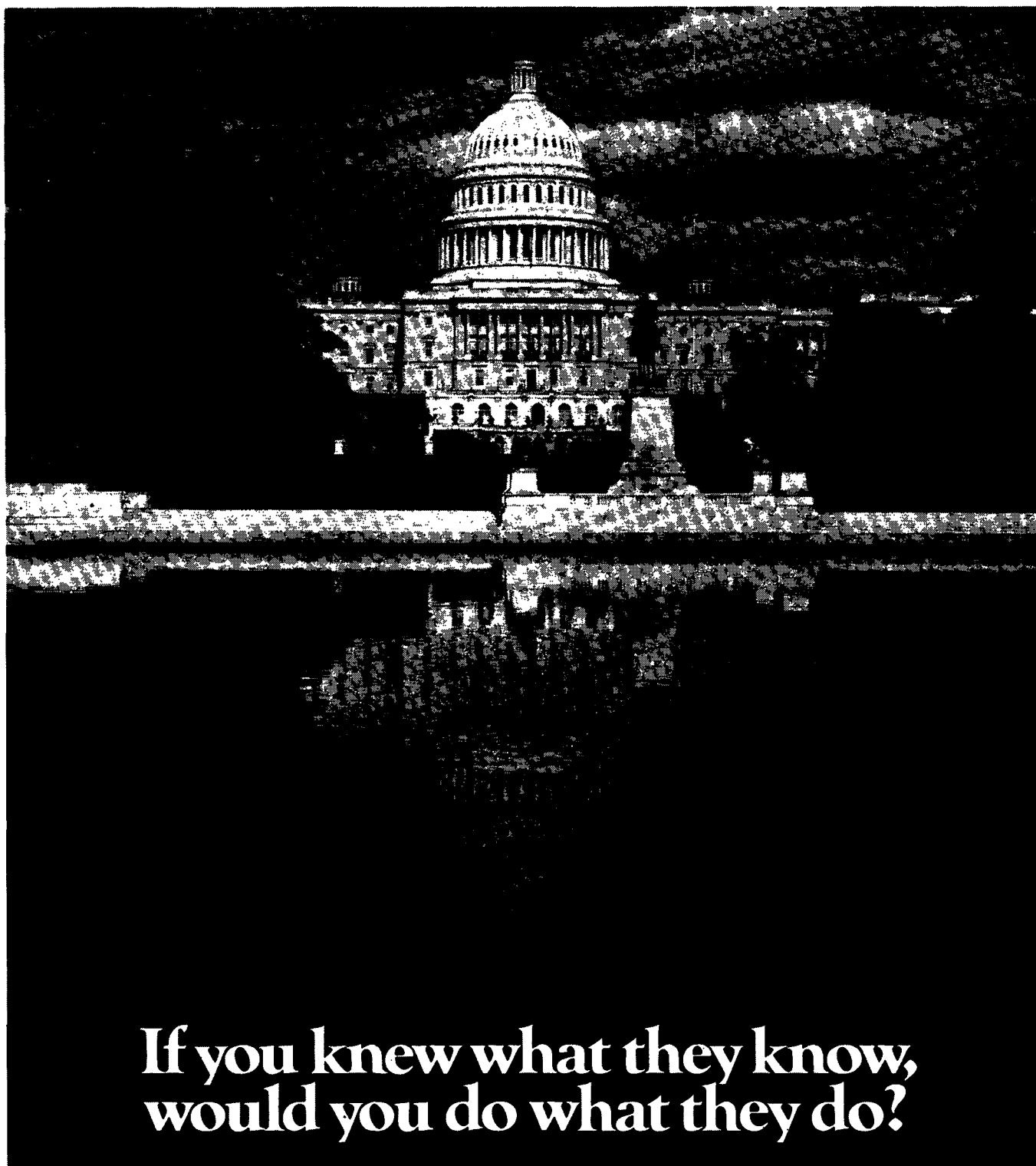
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A Retreat From Power?

Robert Kagan

IN AN article that appeared in these pages seven years ago, Owen Harries, the editor of the quarterly *National Interest*, predicted that if the United States were to decline over the coming decades, it would not be as a result of overtaxed capabilities, or what was then being called "imperial overstretch." It would be because "the American people and their leaders [had] decided that they want other things more than they want to remain the leading power in the world."^{*}

Seven years and one collapsed Soviet empire later, Harries's warning has proved both prophetic and ironic. America does appear, finally, to be in the early stages of its oft-predicted decline as the world's preeminent power, and the cause is neither ineluctable historical currents nor overstretch. A combination of post-cold-war disorientation, a constellation of competing political forces at home, and the surprising triumph of the very "declinist" thinking Harries was then attacking has led American political leaders to accept the inevitability of a more limited American role in the world. But what Harries could not have foreseen was the part conservatives and Republicans would play in justifying and carrying out this "impulse to retreat" (as he dubbed it in 1988).

For the first two years after George Bush's defeat in 1992, there would have been little point in examining Republican foreign policy. The party's attitudes were disparate and half-formed, consisting of the sniping of an opposition that was then in control neither of the presidency nor of the Congress and, therefore, without the need or perhaps even the ability to achieve coherence. Since the recent Republican ascendancy in Congress, however, some of these attitudes have begun to evolve into laws and policies. In the months and years to come, they will increasingly shape America's course in the world, and so it is not too early to ask where exactly the Republican party proposes to take us.

ROBERT KAGAN, who served in the State Department from 1984 to 1988, is Alexander Hamilton Fellow at American University in Washington, D.C. His book, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990*, will be brought out by the Free Press in the fall.

To answer this question properly, it is necessary to have a look at where we have been. For perhaps the first thing to be said about today's Republicans is that they are not where they left off at the end of the cold war, when Ronald Reagan led the nation in what was as close to a global crusade as America has ever attempted.

Reagan's was, of course, a crusade against Communism and the Soviet empire, but it was also more than that. Under Reagan, the United States vastly increased its worldwide influence in both strategic and ideological terms. In Europe, in Latin America, in Asia, and even in Africa, Reagan wielded American influence on behalf of liberal-democratic principles, increasing American security by bringing a greater and greater portion of the world into what one scholar has called a "democratic zone of peace and prosperity."[†] These initiatives, too, played a key role in accelerating the unraveling of the Soviet empire. When the harvest of Reagan's globalism was reaped in the Bush years, the United States emerged with a combined military, economic, ideological, and cultural predominance unknown in human history.

The Reaganesque approach to world affairs not only hastened the collapse of the Soviet empire and created a new *Pax Americana*, but also won enormous support from the American people in three straight presidential elections. At the dawn of the post-cold-war era, the Republican party had established itself as *the* foreign-policy party in America—a fact attested to by Bill Clinton himself when he focused "like a laser" on the domestic economy during the 1992 election campaign. Well he might have done so, for he had no chance of contesting George Bush or any Republican on matters of world affairs.

Once it found itself in opposition to the Clinton presidency, the Republican party might have been expected to be the first to insist on the need for maintaining America's preponderance

^{*} "The Rise of American Decline," May 1988. The phrase "imperial overstretch" was the historian Paul Kennedy's in his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. This book and its reception were the occasion for Harries's article.

[†] Zalmay M. Khalilzad, "From Containment to Global Leadership?," RAND (1995).

of power and influence, and to attack the Democrats' foreign policy from a Reaganite direction. They certainly had ample opportunity to do so. Clinton's term began with the enunciation of the "Tarnoff doctrine," in which the Under Secretary of State, Peter Tarnoff, eerily echoed views expressed by Cyrus Vance during the Carter years in the late 70's about the "limits of our power." It continued with Warren Christopher's humiliating trip to Europe, where the Secretary of State weakly attempted and monumentally failed to win agreement on a more aggressive NATO policy in Bosnia—one of the more serious lapses of American leadership in Europe since the creation of the alliance.

Over the next eighteen months, Clinton wavered in the face of Haitian dictators, withdrew from a humiliating debacle in Somalia, swallowed a Jimmy Carter-brokered deal with North Korea, and reversed his policy of confrontation with China's Communist leaders. Until the successful intervention in Haiti in September of last year, President Clinton could point to scarcely a single instance where he had used American power effectively in the service of American interests or ideals. To the extent that the United States remained powerful and influential in the world, Clinton was living off and depleting the inheritance left by his predecessors; he was certainly adding nothing of his own to the capital fund.

Clinton and the generation of Democrats he represents had proved that they remained temperamentally scarred by Vietnam. While most Democrats of the Truman era and most Republicans of the Reagan era had maintained an unwavering confidence in the rightness of the American cause and the appropriateness of using power in its service, Democrats of the Vietnam era seemed incapable of holding such convictions, and certainly incapable of expressing them. Jimmy Carter, as President, had devoted himself like a penitent sinner to the undoing of America's past wrongs. A decade and a half later, the Clinton administration was still trying to base its foreign policy on some higher plane that transcended national self-interest, and was still hoping to gain its objectives through talk rather than by wielding power. It was an impossible task which every day revealed the Vietnam-era demons still coursing through the Democratic soul, and it did much to weaken Clinton's support among an already skeptical public.

Clinton's Carterite record, then, was vulnerable to a Reaganite attack—but it did not receive one. In 1993 and '94, outspoken Republicans and many if not most conservative policy intellectuals responded to Clinton's weakness and timidity abroad by accusing him instead of reckless adventurism and, for lack of a better phrase, "imperial overstretch." They opposed him not for doing too little but for doing too

much; not for being afraid to use American power but for using it too indiscriminately.

Thus, on Bosnia, Senator John McCain led the Republican attack, warning that any use of military power there would result in another failure like Vietnam or Lebanon. Senator Judd Gregg flatly declared that the United States had "no national interest" in Bosnia. Senator Dan Coats called it a "quagmire." These and other such warnings would be repeated in late May of this year in the face of the most recent Bosnian crisis.

On Haiti, Republicans were unanimous: former President George Bush opposed intervention on the grounds that "no U.S. lives are at risk in Haiti today," and Henry Kissinger declared that the United States must not "make itself the policeman of domestic institutions around the world." Even Congressman Newt Gingrich, usually thought of as a global activist, argued in general that the United States was "overextended around the world."

In a few short years, America had passed through a looking glass into an upside-down world where (some) liberal Democrats were calling for U.S. military action abroad while conservative Republicans warned of swamps, sand traps, neo-colonialism, and "another Vietnam." The result was a timid and uncertain Democratic President whose few half-hearted gestures toward internationalist leadership were attacked and constrained by a Republican opposition in Congress.

WHY did the Republican party collectively choose the direction it did? And—even more to the point—why has it persisted in this path even after the November 1994 mid-term elections, when it took control of the Congress and, in effect, "reelected" Ronald Reagan? The answer involves a unique interaction among political judgments, changing institutional interests, and a broad shift in foreign-policy doctrine.

The political judgment of the Republican party after 1992 was that in the absence of the cold war and the Soviet foe, the American people no longer cared very much about foreign policy, and certainly opposed any further sacrifice of blood or treasure without assurance that vital national-security interests were at stake.

One might assume that, in this judgment, Republicans were responding accurately to the wishes of the majority of Americans. And it is true that there was much talk in the press and in Congress of a national "uproar" following the debacle in Somalia, just as there were predictions of a national disillusionment following the intervention in Haiti, and just as, even today, there are casual references to an "isolationist backlash among the American people." But in fact it is not so clear where this uproar and this backlash are to be found.

Polls, at any rate, do not support the theory that Americans have been in an especially isolationist mood. Indeed, they suggest otherwise. Not only have majorities been willing to see U.S. troops sent abroad for a variety of purposes not directly related to vital national-security interests; but from October 1993, one week *after* the killing of American soldiers in Somalia, through April of this year, polls taken by NBC, ABC, and other organizations have consistently showed majorities even in favor of contributing U.S. troops to UN peacekeeping missions. Despite a plank in the Contract With America opposing such participation, a *Los Angeles Times* poll in January 1995 found 57 percent willing to allow troops to serve under UN command "in some circumstances," and surveys conducted by other organizations in November 1994 and March 1995 found only 41-percent support for the Contract With America proposal.

The anticipated political backlash to Clinton's "reckless" adventure in Haiti also never materialized. In polls taken in the summer of 1994, before the intervention, a majority favored U.S. participation in an international military operation to restore Jean-Bertrand Aristide to the presidency there, with about half of these favoring U.S. action *only* under UN sponsorship. In October, a few weeks after the intervention, Time/CNN found 55-percent approval for Clinton's action, and in a poll taken in April of this year 62 percent of respondents believed the U.S. had done the right thing by sending troops to Haiti. The same poll showed that majorities of Americans also wanted UN peacekeepers in Bosnia to "get tougher," even if that would mean using U.S. troops and suffering some American casualties.* This sentiment was confirmed in the first week of June: while Senator McCain was insisting the American people would not support the introduction of U.S. troops in Bosnia to help UN forces, polls by CNN and *Newsweek* revealed that, on the contrary, substantial majorities did support such action—even after the downing of an American fighter jet.

One need not accept all these survey results as a definitive measure of American popular opinion. Other surveys may have produced different responses, and members of Congress have their own ways of trying to measure the attitudes of their constituents apart from polling data. But the evidence is strong enough to support one very limited conclusion: the American people have not been experiencing an "isolationist backlash." They may not know exactly what they think, their opinions may fluctuate, and they may be capable of being persuaded one way or another. But they have not been driven by events in Haiti, Somalia, or Bosnia into opposing active American involvement overseas.

If Republican foreign policy has not accurately

reflected the popular mood, it has, however, reflected the party's new institutional interests. Congress as a body has always had nonpartisan aspirations to wrestle with the President for control of foreign and defense policy, and Republicans are as susceptible to this particular temptation as are Democrats. To be sure, Gingrich and Henry Hyde tried this year to restore some of the executive's freedom of action by repealing the War Powers Resolution; but they failed to gather enough Republican votes. Republicans have also tried to place new restraints on the President's ability to employ force overseas by insisting on congressional approval for U.S. involvement in international peacekeeping efforts. Moreover, the national-security provisions of the balanced-budget amendment passed by the House would make it impossible for the President to propose deficit spending for defense unless both chambers agreed that the nation was in imminent danger. Although this measure is admittedly intended to make it easier for us to go into debt for defense than for other purposes, the net effect would be to increase the role of Congress in deciding whether international danger exists—traditionally a prerogative of the President since America became a world power.

Inherent in the institution of Congress is a tendency toward a restrained foreign policy. The last time a hot-blooded Congress forced a timid President to conduct a more aggressive foreign policy than he desired was in 1898, when members of the Senate threatened to declare war on Spain whether or not President McKinley asked them to do so. During the 1980's, when Speakers Tip O'Neill and Jim Wright tried to block the Reagan administration at every turn, Republican members liked to complain that Congress was institutionally incapable of conducting foreign policy. The nation, they said, could not afford to have 535 Secretaries of State, none of whom, at the end of the day, had to take responsibility for any foreign-policy failure. Yet purely as an institutional matter, and political orientation aside, Senator Jesse Helms will probably end up having more in common with such past chairmen of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as William Borah, the leading isolationist of the prewar period, and even with J. William Fulbright, than he will with any President, whether Republican or Democrat.

A FINAL ingredient in the new Republican attitude is the development, or rather the recovery, of a policy doctrine which places institutional capabilities, political judgments, budgetary concerns, and partisan interests into a single, coherent, and defensible intellec-

*"Americans on UN Peacekeeping," a report by the Program on International Policy Attitudes, April 27, 1995.

tual framework. This is the doctrine of "realism," and it is one which enjoyed a long lineage in the Republican party before it was replaced, but not entirely eliminated, by Reagan-style idealism in the 1980's.

The defining characteristic of the realist vision has always been a deep pessimism about the ability of a democracy to carry the burdens of power responsibly. Moved by disgust at the wild, irrational swings of national mood between the start of World War I and the beginning of World War II, realists spent the cold war worrying that uncontrollable national passions would lead the country into disastrous global crusades. Unwillingness to accept the realities, and the limits, imposed by the international balance of power, the political theorist Hans Morgenthau once wrote, would lead either to a "total war" of nuclear annihilation or, when the dreams of a new world were dashed, to an equally perilous, insular nationalism or even isolationism.

The alternative, realists constantly reiterated, was to keep America focused on its "national interest"—a thing which they insisted was not only definable but everywhere demonstrable. To achieve this end, however, meant checking the American tendency toward idealism and messianism. At the core of the realist view was a conviction, stated frankly by writers like Walter Lippmann, George Kennan, and Morgenthau, that American foreign policy had to be protected from American democracy.

This cluster of ideas, which is also associated prominently with the name of Henry Kissinger, dominated Republican foreign policy in the Nixon and Ford years. It was the rationale behind the policy of détente, which called for accepting rather than challenging the rising power of the Soviet Union, and for eschewing the ideological battle against Communism.

Reagan attacked the realist approach as early as his run for the presidential nomination against Ford in 1976. As we have seen, Reagan, the most successful Republican politician since Teddy Roosevelt, not only had no use for realist prescriptions but during the years of his presidency constantly appealed to what realists considered the most dangerous instincts of the American people, offering a vision of absolute victory over Communism and of a world free from the danger of nuclear holocaust. Although his policies were usually pragmatic, they were cast, as Harry Truman's had been, in the large framework of the American mission.

BUT the end of the cold war once again changed the balance of power within Republican ranks. When Communism collapsed, many conservatives considered the battle won abroad, and shifted their attention to defending American culture and values at home.

After 1990, what remained in Republican foreign-policy circles was the old core of realists, and it was they who returned to dominance in the Bush administration, bringing with them as well an emphasis on limits. Indeed, the odd thing about the Bush presidency was that the same administration which in the space of two years launched successful invasions of Panama and Iraq also helped to usher in the now-pervasive conviction that America's abilities to influence the world had somehow declined.

Then-Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, who as a former aide to Henry Kissinger was in many ways the quintessential realist in the Bush administration, gave a speech early in Bush's term which was not very different in tone from the one Peter Tarnoff would give four years later on behalf of the Clinton administration. At the end of the cold war, Eagleburger declared, both the United States and the Soviet Union had "crossed the finish line out of breath," and both were faced "with a diminished capacity to influence events and promote our respective interests throughout the world on the scale we have become accustomed to."

To the realists, the disappearance of the Soviet threat and the emergence of the United States as the "sole remaining superpower" posed a danger—namely, that the American people would be carried away by their old Reagan-era idealism into a dangerous utopianism. Thus, Henry Kissinger warned in *Diplomacy* that for the third time in this century, the United States might succumb to the "temptation to recast the international environment in America's image." Kissinger did not use the word "arrogance," but it was arrogance and the idea of American "exceptionalism" that the realists both feared and disdained. "American confidence and optimism," wrote a much-changed Owen Harries in October 1994, were an "invaluable source of strength in times of adversity. In times of triumph they can be a handicap." For its own good, a confident and optimistic America needed to be deflated a bit.

In Harries's new calculus, though American power in the post-cold-war world *appeared* to be on the ascendant, and its capacity to shape that world "in America's image" greater than at any time in its history, this was an illusion. "If you have two superpowers and you take one away, what is left is something less than a superpower." Unlike some other conservatives, Harries understood that the Clinton administration's efforts abroad represented not recklessness but weakness—but he welcomed them on that score, hoping they would "bring back a sense of limits and caution" and introduce a "sense of realism in American foreign policy."

Kissinger, too, insisted that something had been subtracted from American power by the

collapse of the Soviet empire. The United States might be "more preponderant than it was ten years ago, yet, ironically, power has also become more diffuse. Thus, America's ability to employ it to shape the rest of the world has actually decreased." Kissinger wanted Americans to accept gracefully a return to a world like that of the "European state system of the 18th and 19th centuries," a world where the United States would be no more than "*primus inter pares*." Although he urged that we not view our inevitably diminished stature as a "humbling of America," humility was, after all, what was being prescribed.

And so we come back to the present moment, and to the party which "reelected Ronald Reagan"—a party that has found its home in Congress, where curbing presidential power is what they do best; a party that has convinced itself that the American people are in an isolationist mood; and a party seeking reasons to spend less on everything, including foreign policy. In short, a party looking to limit things has found a doctrine which makes of limits a virtue.

SEVENTY-FIVE years ago, at a moment not dissimilar to today's, Republicans opposing Woodrow Wilson's utopian internationalism abroad and mild restructuring of government at home urged instead a "return to normalcy." In the 1920 presidential campaign, these Republicans disparaged Wilson's dream of taking a disorganized world of imperialist powers and bandits and making it "safe for democracy," and they celebrated the defeat of his League of Nations covenant, which, in their view, would have deprived America of its sovereignty and freedom of action. Pointing to marines stationed in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua, and recalling Pershing's ultimately futile expedition into Mexico, they proclaimed that the United States could no longer behave as the "world's policeman."

Republicans believed then that their repudiation of Wilsonianism was good politics as well as good policy: the American people wanted a break from so much international involvement. And it was easy to stir xenophobic and even racist passions against the League of Nations. These are the Republicans who later came to be demonized as "isolationists"; but in fact most of them were not. At the time, and in the absence of any threatening adversary, the idea of a "return to normalcy" after the excesses of Wilsonianism seemed plausible enough.

"Return to normalcy" well summarizes the disparate sensibilities that are swirling through Republican ranks today, and that the doctrine of realism serves to undergird. Like their Harding-era counterparts, Republicans now see a chaotic world of ethnic and nationalist violence, problems that the United States should not begin to

try to "solve." Although they favor American leadership in the world, most Republicans want the U.S. to pay more attention to problems at home; to shed some of the burdens of superpowerdom; to avoid as much as possible the entanglements of multilateral and international organizations; to look after American interests "first"; and to keep American soldiers out of harm's way except where "vital" interests are at stake. However messy it may be, the world looks secure enough to them to afford this more "normal," less demanding, and less expensive foreign policy.

As in 1920, it all sounds reasonable enough. We know now, however, that that earlier "return to normalcy" left Americans materially and psychologically ill-prepared to face the challenges of the more dangerous 1930's, and that over time, "normalcy" slid dangerously close to a genuinely irresponsible isolationism.

The term "isolationist" has never fairly described any American foreign policy at any time, and it is of no greater value today. A party that demands the immediate expansion of NATO eastward; that stands for international free trade and rigorous efforts to enforce global nuclear nonproliferation; and that speaks constantly of the need for American leadership in the world is not an isolationist party. Nor does history simply repeat itself. But without conjuring up alarmist visions of a new Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan, it does not take a great deal of foresight to see the dangers that might arise from an American "return to normalcy" in the 1990's.

Today's relatively benign international order was created by the United States in World War II and in the subsequent four-and-a-half decades of the cold war through great effort and at great expense. It is especially the product of the ideologically-charged global activism that characterized the Reagan years, when Americans, guided by Reagan's simple vision, came to understand the close links among the spread of democracy, the expansion of free markets, the deterrence and punishment of aggression, and American security. This benign order is neither the natural state of the world nor the inevitable product of a Hegelian dialectic. It is, on the contrary, a fragile, temporary situation, and dependent for its continuance on high levels of American power, influence, and engagement. If America begins to behave like a more "normal" power, the rest of the world will adjust accordingly—adjust, that is, to the diminution of American influence and involvement.

Would that be desirable? We do not need to go back to the 19th or 18th centuries to see what such a "normal" world would look like. In the first four decades of this century, before the United States defeated Japan and Germany, imposed democratic governments on them, and deprived them of their military might, and be-

fore the United States held the balance of power in both Europe and Asia, the world behaved normally enough.

In Asia, the normal situation was confrontation and war between an aggressive Russia and an aggressive Japan, a constant struggle for control of China and the Korean peninsula, and a periodical closing of the "Open Door" in America's face. Today one could add to that explosive combination an increasingly powerful and assertive China and a nuclear-armed North Korea.

In Europe, the normal situation consisted of one simple fact: that Germany was too big and too powerful for the rest of the continent. Kissinger has rightly extolled the genius of the statesmen who created the Concert of Europe after the defeat of Napoleon. But after the unification of Germany in 1871, that Concert survived barely twenty years, and for the next five decades Europe experienced almost constant tension and then, finally, the two most destructive wars in the history of mankind.

The rise of the United States to preeminence in the world created a new configuration of international relationships which, for a time at least, offered an antidote to these recurring crises. A decline to "*primus inter pares*" in a "multipolar" world would change that configuration once again, and in ways that could only harm American interests. Peter W. Rodman, a former government official who now directs the national-security program at the Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom, has recently warned that a diminishing American role in Europe and Asia could not but weaken the bonds that so far have kept German and Japanese geopolitical ambitions in check:

An American withdrawal—or even the perception of it—could lead to new independent-mindedness on the part of these countries, creating massive insecurity on the part of all their neighbors.

The diminution of American power and influence would also help determine the course Russia takes in the coming decades. If Americans believe Russia has adopted a nationalist, paranoid, and aggressive posture today, we need only wait until Russian leaders confront, on their western and eastern frontiers, rearmed and independent-minded Germans and Japanese unmoored from their security links with the United States.

A return to the complex great-power competition that characterized the first decades of this century would mean a severe reduction in the freedom of action America enjoys today. Balance-of-power politics requires a degree of self-denial that Americans have not been forced to exercise since the 18th century. It requires extensive compromise in order to woo and keep allies—com-

pared to which today's difficult compromises on trade, on arms control, and on international values are child's play. Americans would have to learn, above all, to accept a lower level of national security, since the very essence of a multipolar world is a degree of insecurity shared by all. Nor have we yet had the chance to experience what a multipolar, balance-of-power world might look like when five or more great powers of relatively equal strength are all armed with nuclear weapons.

WE HAVE, thank goodness, not yet reached that point. The declinists notwithstanding, today's world has not already become multipolar. Germany and Japan still prefer U.S. predominance to any alternative arrangement, and even Russia wants America to remain active in Europe; the nations of Central and Eastern Europe yearn to be under our protective umbrella; the peoples of this hemisphere compete for inclusion in our economic sphere; and the nations of East and Southeast Asia fear only that we will withdraw our military power from their region. In other words, this is still the world of a "sole superpower," and still ours to preserve as such.

Yet the very success of American foreign policy so far in checking the ambitions of other world powers might become its undoing. As a result of that success, Rodman writes, "it is true that America faces no overwhelming or immediate threat." But the "fallacy," he continues,

is to assume that removing the pivotal factor in the benign international situation—the American contribution—will not topple the whole structure. It will.

For the past three years, self-described "conservative internationalists" like Rodman have urged the repudiation of Clinton-style internationalism while insisting that the United States preserve its role as the preeminent balancing power in Europe and Asia—the "core" of American security interests. They propose that the United States assume greater, not lesser, responsibility for the peace and stability of the present international order.

Theoretically, this brand of conservative internationalism is not incompatible with attacks on Clinton's foreign policy. In practice, however, the tide of a Republican-led "return to normalcy" threatens to wash over all forms of internationalism without discrimination, including the kind Rodman and those who think like him favor. As he has been among the first to point out, "The brave words in the Contract With America about 'revitalization' of our defense capabilities" have not translated into a serious effort to undo the "precipitous drop" in those capabilities. Indeed, Republicans helped defeat their own party's proposal for increased spending on ballistic-missile defense.

As in defense, so in other areas of foreign policy. In their otherwise laudable effort to reduce spending, congressional Republicans mean to cut massively into foreign-aid programs. It is true that such programs often do not help the economies of developing countries; but they do bring influence—an extremely valuable commodity—and they make up less than 1 percent of the federal budget. Similarly, in their efforts to limit the President's capacity to deploy U.S. troops overseas, Republicans have begun to constrain the ability of *any* future administration, Democrat or Republican, to conduct a vigorous foreign policy.

There is something in this of trying to have things both ways: calling for American leadership while systematically paring down the tools necessary to exert that leadership; vowing that we must shoulder the responsibilities of the world's foremost democratic power while opposing almost any exercise of that power on behalf of American values, even in our own hemisphere; urging an expanded NATO while doing nothing to provide the increased resources and political will that such vastly increased responsibilities require.

The analogy with the 1920's is again instructive. Then, too, there were "conservative internationalists" like Henry Cabot Lodge who simultaneously worked to defeat Wilsonian internationalism and who yet believed the United States had an important role to play in preserving the post-war order in Europe. But in the end, the first goal obliterated the second. It may be partly true, as Rodman insists, that Clinton's foreign policies have helped drive Republicans toward isolationism.

This was also partly true in the days of Wilson and Lodge. History has nevertheless not looked kindly on their behavior.

IN THEORY, either of the political parties could ensure continued American predominance in the 21st century. The Democrats did so in the past under Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, and today even some Clintonites speak as if they yearned to do so again. But the fact that they summoned up the courage to put force behind their words once, in Haiti, has yet to compensate for the many ways they have weakened America's standing in the world. The present generation of Democratic leaders simply does not have the stomach for world leadership.

That leaves the Republicans. Perhaps, as the 1996 elections approach, they will stop thinking of themselves simply as the congressional party, and will begin to articulate the kinds of foreign and defense policies they would like to carry out from the White House. Perhaps, too, they will cease their flirtation with realism, with an emphasis on limits and decline, and return to the confidence and optimism that both Truman and Reagan once inspired. And perhaps in doing so they may recall that American foreign policy succeeds best when it reflects the ideals of the American people—who are a more sensible lot than the realists would have us believe. This, at any rate, was the true understanding of America's nature and America's purpose which for more than a decade made the Republicans *the* foreign-policy party in America.

Sex Among the Americans

Joseph Adelson

I TEACH a seminar for first-year undergraduates on the troubles of adolescence. During a discussion of teenage illegitimacy not too long ago, I mentioned in passing a surprising datum I had just come across: the average American woman, during her lifetime, has two sex partners. The reaction in my classroom was electric—amazement, disbelief. That can't be! It's more than that! They must be lying!

These are youngsters, mind, who can absorb the most horrendous social statistics—that the killing of adolescents has increased fourfold in the last decade, that two-thirds of all black children are born out of wedlock—without batting an eye. They may or may not find such data troubling (it is often hard to tell), but they do not find them shocking. What shocked them was the *not-shocking*—news of modesty, decorum, restraint.

After class, a young man came up to me who wanted to know the data for homosexuality in the source I had referred to. Well, I replied, if self-definition is the criterion, the figures are a bit under 3 percent for males, and between 1 and 2 percent for females. He was furious. I know that literature in detail, he told me, we're studying it in philosophy (!) class; those numbers are not only false but probably falsified, and I'm sure they're being circulated to discourage the gay community, which in fact is growing by leaps and bounds.

Later in the week, thinking these inflamed responses might reflect the passions of youth, I asked several friends and colleagues—each and every one of them (it goes without saying) wise and worldly-wise—to estimate the number of partners American women have over a lifetime. Their guesses ranged from a low of six to a high of twenty. When apprised of the figure I had come across, they, too, reacted with disbelief, in some cases mixed with heavy sarcasm about the pretensions of survey research and what one of them termed “social so-called science.”

Where, then, did I get the numbers I had so innocently broadcast? From a recent sociological

study, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*,* published in both a popular and scholarly edition, the latter under the appropriately academic title, *The Social Organization of Sexuality*.† This, the publishers tell us, is the “only comprehensive and methodologically sound survey of America's sexual practices and beliefs.” That is dust-jacket puffery; but it reflects fairly well the authors' own, somewhat self-admiring view of their project.

They were drawn to it, they tell us, by dissatisfaction with prior studies of American sexual behavior. At their best, earlier surveys like the famous one done by Alfred Kinsey and his associates in 1948 were well-intentioned but flawed, the most common problem being a reliance on catch-as-catch-can methods of recruiting interviewees. These studies also lacked any means for checking the truthfulness of the responses given, and the worst of them, like the egregious *Hite Report* on female sexuality of 1976, solicited responses from selected and sometimes highly politicized groups. In the case of the *Hite Report* that meant that the data were drawn from members of the National Organization for Women, abortion-rights advocates, and the like; even so, *Hite* managed but a 3-percent response rate, making it certain that the respondents bore little likeness to American women in general.

The authors of *Sex in America* set out to do things right by sampling accurately our adult population (aged 18-60); preparing a carefully pre-tested questionnaire; training their interviewers rigorously; and introducing several methods of checking the veracity of the responses obtained. One may have some serious reservations, as I do, about what went into the questionnaire as well as what was left out, and about the interpretations offered; but the sampling itself is state-of-the-art, and the authors are right to be pleased with themselves. Carrying out a national survey of this scope is extremely expensive (\$450 per interview) and requires great technical expertise and a high level of patience and compulsiveness.

* By Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon, Edward O. Laumann, and Gina Kolata. Little, Brown., 300 pp., \$22.95.

† By Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. University of Chicago Press, 718 pp., \$49.95.

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As a culture—and my students beautifully represent that culture—we have come to believe that the degree of individual sexual pleasure can be placed on a linear chart extending from “inhibited” at one end to “liberated” at the other. The sexually free are unattached and unencumbered. They have been everywhere and done everything, and are ready for more—more positions, more variations, more partners, more often. At the other extreme are those who have sex only within marriage and then only infrequently, who employ the missionary position, perform the act rapidly, and achieve shallow orgasms or none at all.

Though we might not say so openly, many of us also tend to believe that blacks are more active sexually than whites, and that those belonging to conservative religious denominations are bound to be more inhibited than those without any religious affiliation. And we may also believe that, sooner or later, sex with the same person becomes too familiar and boring, leading us to seek adventure elsewhere. After all, a cardinal rule in matters sexual is that we are drawn to those unlike us, to what is alien or taboo: opposites attract.

What the research gathered in *Sex in America* tells us is that none of the above is true. In fact, American sexuality is marked by moderation and fidelity. Husbands and wives are faithful to each other, and so are those living together though unmarried. Even the unattached rarely wander, and are certainly not promiscuous. As I had accurately reported to my students, one-half of all Americans of both sexes have three or fewer partners in a lifetime; as one might expect, men are more active sexually, but not by a wide margin. (And lest one protest that all this is the baleful legacy of American Puritanism, parallel studies throughout the Western world, in countries Catholic as well as Protestant, yield essentially the same findings.)

American sexual *practices* are, similarly, conventional. Vaginal intercourse is by far the most appealing mode, almost universally judged exciting and pleasurable. It is followed, at a distance, by the mild voyeurism of “watching partners undress,” and then by oral sex. All other sexual practices—group sex, anal sex in its several variations, sadomasochism, the use of sexual toys and devices, homosexuality, sex with strangers, watching strangers have sex—all these are deemed unappealing, in most cases very unappealing, and by all segments of the population, men and women, young and old.

Sex in America (as I told my young student of philosophy) comes up with a dramatically lower figure for homosexual identity and practice. Until quite recently, the standard number was 10 percent, and when cited it was often preceded by the phrase “at least,” suggesting that the true figure was higher and was being suppressed either by caution or by shame. Many psychologists and psychiatrists had their doubts about this, believ-

ing the true figure to be 5 to 6 percent for men, and half that for women; but for the most part these doubts went unvoiced. We now learn that even the reduced number was too high. Fewer than 3 percent of men identify themselves as homosexual; more inclusive criteria give us no more than 5 percent. Lesbianism is about half as common. European studies provide similar data.

Among the most interesting findings in *Sex in America* are what one might call the absent findings: in particular, the absence of expected variations associated with race, ethnicity, education, religion, and the like. Both the popular and the scholarly editions of this study are glutted with charts and tables illustrating these modest or nonexistent differences. How frequently do men achieve orgasm with their “primary partners”? About three-quarters of men say “always,” no matter what their age, marital status, education, or race. Between a quarter to a third of women say the same, again regardless of age, marital status, education, or race. “How many times do you have sex each month?” Again, little variation: almost always six to seven times a month, for men and women, well-educated or not, of all religious affiliations; the only blip is that those over fifty report a slightly lower rate (four or five times monthly).

To *whom* do we become attached? Here we come to a central emphasis of this study: we become dear to those who are near, that is, those who are like us and whom we come to know in the daily routines and venues of our lives. Sexual behavior, the authors tell us time and again, is shaped by the social networks we occupy. We choose (and are chosen by) those within our network, those like us in almost all respects—race, religion, education, class. We rarely venture out of these boundaries, and should we try to, those within them signal their disapproval.

So it is like-to-like. Opposites do not attract; to the contrary, we do not often cross barriers, and socially we do not often move much up or down in those we date, sleep with, or marry. Our sexual partners are more often those we first met at school or work than those we met at a bar or on vacation. Indeed, given the insularity of most sexual interaction, the authors reach the same conclusion Michael Fumento did years ago* on the future of AIDS infection: it will not touch most heterosexuals.

IF YOU enjoy wallowing in numbers, the tables in *Sex in America* provide what seem to be small surprises now and again. For example: more conservative Protestant women report always having orgasms than do women of any other religion. Really? Yes, really; but also not really—they do outpace others in the “always” category, but that aside, there are

* “AIDS: Are Heterosexuals at Risk?” COMMENTARY, November 1987.

no other important differences by religion. Nor do the occasional variations by race and education add up to a consistent pattern. Blacks, for example, are high on a few measures, but average or low on others.

Still, that figure about conservative Protestant women and their orgasms does point to what is the real bombshell in this study. Not only does it turn out that, in the war between the prudes and the libertines, Americans in general have continued to hold fast on the side of the prudes. It also turns out—horror!—that the prudes are having much more fun.

This study, in fact, is a paean to sexual bonding, to marriage or its near-equivalents. Intimate, exclusive relationships between spouses or committed partners provide, by far, the greatest degree of sexual gratification. More: in a finding that turns the standard scenario of pornography on its head, these books reveal that those without committed partners are far less likely to engage in casual sex during a given period than to do without sex altogether. Twenty-three percent of unattached men report having had no sex, as opposed to less than 1 percent of those married or living with someone; among women, the figures are 32 percent compared to 2 percent. At the other extreme, attached men and women are twice as likely as unattached to have sex two or more times a week. In the pleasure sweepstakes, monogamy counts.

And we are not done. Perhaps the most astonishing single datum reported in these books has to do with those conducting extramarital affairs: they report that they are more gratified sexually by their *spouses* than by their lovers. To add insult to injury, they also have sex less often than those faithfully married. Among the unmarried, those who have at least two sexual partners are less pleased with their sex lives, emotionally *and* physically, than those married or living together. For women in particular, a close attachment is essentially a necessity for a gratifying sex life.

LET me sum up, in the authors' own words, the key findings of this research. Whether you count by "adult lifetime or in the past year," nearly all Americans have "a very modest number of partners." This number "varies little with education, race, or religion." Rather, it is determined by marital status or by whether a couple is living together. Once married, people tend to have one and only one partner, and those who are married and living together are almost as likely to be faithful. Sexual practices, moreover, are highly conventional. Only vaginal intercourse is universally attractive, while almost all the *outré* variations are disliked. Finally, when it comes to sexual pleasure, liberation carries a palpable cost, fidelity its own very great reward.

Which leads to a question: if all this is essentially correct, why are my students and my friends

and all the rest of us so mistaken? Why do we think of ourselves as a society which has happily (or, for those scandalized by it, sinfully) thrown off most of the constraints of the past, a society in which more and more of us are sexually adventurous both before and during marriage, and are willing and even eager to try out exotic sexual combinations and practices?

Well, for one thing we believe what "empirical science" has taught us to believe. The Kinsey data, initially so shocking, were rather quickly absorbed into the conventional wisdom. The 10-percent "datum" for homosexuality, for example, had its origins in the Kinsey findings. That statistic and others like it were not superseded by more accurate ones, in large part because subsequent studies made the same sorts of sampling error. Kinseyesque findings were thus presumably confirmed and became accepted even by those distressed by what they implied morally. In this connection, it is ironically pertinent that the research in *Sex in America* failed to win federal support because of the opposition of conservative legislators who expected that it would show a high level of deviant behavior.

This in itself tells us that sexual information is not ideologically neutral. Sexuality is important terrain in the cultural wars that divide us, and what we believe to be true about it is conditioned by a larger set of assumptions and expectations about human nature and the social order. In particular, when we read about sex, or see it portrayed in films or on television, we do not see its mundane, quotidian side; we see persons taking dangerous risks to achieve pleasure, or struggling to realize their true selves by means of erotic liberation.

Robert Lichter of the Media Research Center reports that seven out of eight sexual encounters in television dramas involve extramarital relations. No surprise there—the illicit is all but a *sine qua non* of the dramatic. Yet this same partiality is found throughout the public culture. As I write, my local newspaper—small-city, staid, sober in most respects—has helpfully brought us a report of a bright new development in erotic practice called playful sadomasochism, wherein the gestures and rituals of the real thing are mimicked without serious pain being inflicted. My favorite national newspaper, the *Wall Street Journal*, recently ran a front-page story on another bright new trend, this one among women: serial bisexuality, or going back and forth between male and female partners. These accounts have in common the tone and feel of fashion reporting, complete with the tacit assurance to the shy that, however odd it may appear at the moment, this is indeed the coming style.

Missing in all these savvy, wide-eyed reports is any sense of the everyday torments free-lance sexuality imposes on ordinary and (as we glean from *Sex in America*) even not-so-ordinary people. Will he (she) like it? Will she (he) have

an orgasm? Is my body attractive? Do I smell badly? Can I keep going long enough? Will he (she) *really* like it? Am I better than he (she) has had before? Am I being too rough? Not rough enough? Too responsive? Not responsive enough? And on, and on. Not everyone is quite so anxious, but as any psychotherapist can testify, a great many are.

Nor does one need therapeutic testimony to confirm the part played in sexual life by self-doubt, shame, and narcissistic injury. Simply visit any good bookstore to find a substantial array of titles offering advice, instruction, encouragement, and spiritual uplift designed to calm your fears, assuage your guilt, overcome your embarrassment, and protect you against humiliation, thus making the sexual act enjoyable, or in some cases simply possible. Media sex, with its incessant stress on triumph and variety, is blind to this side of sexual feeling; one might say it represents a manic defense against it, if not a denial of its existence.

And this leads us to yet another answer to the question of why we were all so mistaken. Those who construct the public image of sexuality in our country—journalists, dramatists, pundits, professors, etc.—occupy quite a special sociological niche within the population at large, and their constructions to a greater or lesser degree tend to mirror their own attitudes and practices. Significantly, only a quarter of the overall survey sample in *Sex in America*—those whom the authors term “recreationals”—see sex in terms of pleasure alone, removed from obligation, devotion, or moral concern, and these same “recreationals” are four to five times more likely to have committed adultery, and two to three times more likely to have engaged in deviant sex. We learn from the sociological charts provided by the authors that—surprise—these same “recreationals” tend to be without religious affiliation. In which academic and professional precincts they live, and what they do for a living, it is not hard to guess.

AS OPPOSED to the “recreationals,” a substantial majority of those surveyed in *Sex in America* report that they are guided in their sexual practices by their religious beliefs, or link sex to marriage or a loving attachment. Here we begin to see most clearly how differences in moral outlook play out in behavior. And here, too, we edge close to the realm of values. This is a realm which our authors, for their part, sedulously strive to avoid.

They, after all, are sociologists (with the exception of Gina Kolata, a science journalist), and they bring to their enterprise a fierce belief in the heuristic powers of their discipline. Thus, they inform us quite solemnly that they have employed the “advanced and sophisticated methods of social-science research,” the same ones that have worked so well in the study of such topics

as “labor-force participation . . . or migration behavior.” In analyzing their findings, they rely almost entirely on two quintessentially social-scientific concepts: social networks and the (sexual) marketplace.

They seem unable, however, to grasp how little these concepts explain. In a long discussion of racial barriers, for instance, the authors succeed in demonstrating that only rarely do American blacks and whites become sexual or marital partners. They cite this finding to support their emphasis on the general explanatory power of social networks as cementers of sexual bonds. But whatever the figures may be for whites and blacks, marriages between whites and Asian-Americans have now become commonplace. If race is so important, how did that happen, and why?

Nor do we hear anything from the authors about the Jews, whose rates of intermarriage are now high enough to threaten the group’s survival. When I was a boy, one did not marry outside the faith because doing so would mortify one’s family. Needless to say, that pattern changed, and rather quickly. Why? Is religion a less powerful barrier than race? Is family less powerful than class or peer group?

Again: in illustrating the efficacy of social networks, the authors provide a fairly long discussion of how the sexes were kept apart on campuses during the 1950’s and early 1960’s, when colleges acted *in loco parentis* as guardians of sexual boundaries. Then, in the late 60’s, they tell us, due to the pressures of the youth movement, these rules disappeared “virtually overnight,” and the era of sexual liberation was unloosed. But no matter what was, or was not, happening in the dormitories between one moment and the next, the same tired notion of a social network is brought in to explain it. How can this be? A social network that stops on a dime, completely reverses direction, and still performs the same function, has no value as an explanatory concept. It is simply a piece of jargon.

Consider, finally, the concept of the sexual marketplace, which the authors invoke to explain how people choose mates. Each person in a pair—so the reasoning goes—trades his or her assets to make the most advantageous match available. Among the examples given are those of Ross Perot and Henry Kissinger, both of whom, the second time around, found women younger and more attractive than themselves, trading money and power for youth and beauty. The authors believe that all such calculations are unconscious; “certainly most people are not consciously aware” of them.

To the contrary, most of us are very much aware of them, and some of us can think of nothing else. My Aunt Sadie’s truisms on marriage were largely devoted to such observations: “He didn’t marry her for her looks, but her father has a nice business.” Come to think of it, so are the truisms of Aunt Jane Austen, Uncle Anthony Trollope,

and most of the other greats and not-so-greats who have written about what goes into the formation of domestic arrangements.

THE concepts of "network" and "marketplace," in other words, allow us to fashion explanations after the fact—*post hoc ergo propter hoc*. They are a capacious umbrella under which we can place everything we already know—but little else. Why are a given network's boundaries sometimes permeable and sometimes not? How does a group's history influence its members? Which networks evolve in expectable directions, and which do not, and why? These questions are never asked by our authors because they cannot be answered with the equipment they have assembled.

Even more troubling is the avoidance of any consideration of the inner world—the world of motives and character—which influences sexual and mental behavior. Some of the findings simply cry out for the insights of sociobiology, a discipline mentioned briefly only to be firmly dismissed. And when it comes to the psychological sources of behavior, the authors are singularly myopic.

A small but revealing example can be found in the index; for the category "shame," the entry reads, "see guilt." But guilt and shame are very different emotions, different not only subjectively but also in origin and effect. Another small example: general happiness, the authors discover, is correlated with a good sex life—but which comes first? Amazingly, they confess to not having a clue.

The most revealing instance of such myopia concerns the treatment of forced sex. The authors find that about one-fifth of women report having been coerced sexually at some time. The coercers are not, as one might assume, strangers or casual pickups; most of them are husbands or loved ones. And it is usually not clear just what the coercion consists of, though it seems not to be physical assault or rape. Now, these same women also report having many problems in sexual response—pains, difficulty in lubricating, lack of pleasure. It would appear they are inhibited about sex, and would prefer to avoid it. But then we also learn that they have many more sexual partners, and engage in more deviant activities. Finally, sex aside, they are unhappy in general.

What does it all mean? The authors dance around, unable to venture a coherent explanation. It is a case of political correctness—a fear of blaming the victim—joined to a *déformation professionnelle*, the limitations produced by vocational bias: in this case, an aversion to psychological inferences. They cannot, in short, bring themselves to state the obvious: these are troubled women whose troubles are almost certainly rooted in personality. Here, as elsewhere throughout

their study, the authors have built a conceptual cage and locked themselves in.

BUT I do not want to end on a wholly critical note. Many of the reviews of this study have been negative, at times scathingly so, the burden of complaint being close to that voiced by my first-year undergraduates—that you cannot trust what people tell you in an interview on sex; that the researchers are self-deceived to think otherwise; that we need some objective, independent measures of the truth, otherwise we are at the mercy of those who lie, or fudge, or misremember, or leave things out.

That is a powerful argument; but consider where it leads us. Sex is not the only sensitive topic; it is one of many. There is a (perhaps apocryphal) story about Freud taking into analysis an aristocratic Viennese gentleman whose sexual practices were remarkably perverse. After weeks of describing them in gruesome detail, the patient said: "Dr. Freud, I have an awful confession to make. There's something I've been ashamed to tell you." Astonished, Freud asked what it was. The patient replied, "My father was a shopkeeper."

Psychologists use that anecdote in clinical teaching to illustrate resistance stemming from sources other than sexuality: people are sensitive about how much money they earn, how much education they have had, what college they attended (if any), along with the more obvious topics like alcohol consumption, drug use, cheating on taxes, and so forth. But the anecdote also has a wider applicability.

Most psychological research, Freud's included, depends on self-reporting to some degree. It can rarely do independent checks on veracity, and hence it cannot fully guarantee the probity of its findings. This is an old problem—and those who do survey research are, most of them, especially aware of it. They do what can be done, practically speaking, and present their data honestly and modestly. What other choices do we have? Do we declare some topics off-limits to research? If so, we will soon enough substitute our own experience, writ large, or our own imaginings, or our stern beliefs about what ought to be.

That is just what we have done to sexuality—as this study, despite its flaws, allows us to see. Its strength rests on its technical competence and its findings, which carry us beyond, and largely discredit, the data of earlier studies. That is a lot. The rest, which has to do with human happiness and how it is won and lost, lies in the domain of subtler doctors of the soul than sociologists.

But is it not wonderful enough to learn, through graphs, charts, tables, and survey data, that many of the secrets of such human happiness, no matter how obscure they may be to undergraduates and their professors, have not altogether been lost to most men and women?

Computers & Their Discontents

Daniel J. Silver

IF WE measure the success of a revolution by the frequency with which the term itself is invoked, then the revolution in information technology must be the most successful in history. It is not possible to pick up a newspaper or magazine today without reading about the way our conceptions of work and leisure, and possibly all of our social relations, are undergoing a sea-change through the proliferation of new electronic media. Whether or not one feels "computer literate," one can hardly have avoided such notions as "multimedia," the "information superhighway," the "Internet," the "World Wide Web," and "virtual reality." To judge by the *Wall Street Journal*, positioning oneself to take advantage of all this is the consuming obsession of the marketplace, what with Microsoft and Time Warner and Viacom and a host of other giant and tiny companies perpetually seeming to get married, divorced, bought out, and spun off.

The interlinking of computers, communications technology, and the media has even sparked a sub-industry of its own: a shelf-load of books explaining the so-called digital revolution and arguing its pros and cons. The authors of these books can be usefully divided into three categories: technoboosters, who essentially tout the glory of the coming age; doomsayers, who take the claims of the technoboosters in deadly earnest but put the direst possible construction on them; and sober realists, most of them technicians who have put in their time in the digital trenches and know a thing or two about their subject.

Before examining this literature, it may be useful to take stock of where we are. After all, we have lived with computers for decades now, and with the personal computer (PC) since the beginning of the 1980's; what today is new?

On the business front, first of all, some basic changes have been made possible by advances that have increased computing power while decreasing its cost, and by the interconnection of computers through networks. Instead of having to rely on expensive "mainframes"—those big shiny

boxes kept in air-conditioned, glass-enclosed rooms—corporations can interlink the latest generation of much cheaper PC's in networks and save money not only on hardware but by restructuring business operations. The hub of a network is a "server"—a sort of small, drone computer that stores and distributes information and programs—and technical improvements in servers have led to enormous growth in networking applications.

These technological changes have accompanied the greatest business trend of the 90's: "business process re-engineering" (BPR), a set of guidelines for improving productivity and lowering costs through the streamlining of tasks. And that leads directly to another breakthrough promised for the near future: entertainment media distributed through new computer-based networks. One possibility is "video-on-demand" (VOD). Instead of popping down to the store for cassettes, you will be able to stay home and choose from a huge menu stored in a high-speed "video server"; simply press the remote control on your interactive "smart TV" and your movie will be "downloaded" over fiber-optic cable lines or beamed by direct-broadcast satellite right to your living room.

And then there is the Net. A few years ago, Vice President Al Gore (then still a Senator) began to invoke the need for an "information superhighway." A great booster of technology and a sometime computer programmer himself, Gore was chagrined that the French had beat us to a centralized, nationwide data network connected to the phone system. Something like this was what he wanted for the United States.

Reality soon enough set in, and the Vice President's assigned task in the new administration became cost-cutting. No one wanted to pay for the vast expense of a public network, and besides, why not let private industry foot the bill? Yet business can count costs as well, and suddenly everyone began to notice that a robust network was already there, in place: the Internet.

The Internet is a worldwide, high-speed network operating over "dedicated" (single-purpose) lines which connect different servers together. It was begun by ARPA, the Defense Department's research-and-development arm, and was origi-

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nally called Arpanet. The idea was to create quick communications links for scientists in order to stimulate the exchange of ideas and (hence) technological progress. Within several years, it had grown into a global resource, at first used largely by scientists at universities, then by corporate researchers, and then by many academics generally.

And now? As business sees opportunities for marketing products and conducting financial transactions, everyone is being invited on to the Net. But aside from the many technical problems entailed by expanded usage, no one knows how much demand there might be for the envisaged new services. Still, despite the considerable downside risk, a lot of money is being gambled that a jackpot is at the end of the line.

THE smell of money is never far from the pages of *Being Digital*,¹ the best-selling work of our first technobooster, Nicholas Negroponte, founding director of MIT's Media Lab and columnist for *Wired* magazine (described by Negroponte himself as a "life-style magazine for the digital world"). The very appearance of this book invites attention: the jet-black cover is encased in a clear plastic jacket, with the title starkly affixed in black and white, as if simply to pick up this artifact were to enter a new state of consciousness. Actually, the book is as newfangled as a microwave oven; the contents prove to be warmed-over versions of columns from *Wired*.

It must be said that Negroponte possesses exactly the right credentials for telling us about the new possibilities of the information age. For several decades he has taken a leading role in the effort to link media to computers, and he knows the lay of the land. It is not surprising, then, that after so much labor he should want to share his recently renewed sense of excitement. For after a long period of drought, deep pockets in the business world are now interested in backing digitized media, and suddenly there looms on the horizon the prospect of "being digital" on a huge scale—and of the kind of market which broadcasters have enjoyed since the dawn of television. Negroponte has a number of interesting thoughts on this subject, and all sorts of specific advice. (For instance, he thinks that the effort to create high-definition television is misguided; we do not need better picture quality, but more information, to be made possible by the conversion of content to digital form.) But it is the central conceit of this book that we are living in a world moving fast toward the digital translation of traditional modes of storing and distributing goods and services of *all* kinds.

Negroponte takes delight in a metaphorical comparison. Where we have previously relied on shifting about huge masses of atoms, in the form of packages and other "hard" media, now we can

send weightless, almost costless bits of data. (A bit is the smallest element of digital logic, standing for a "1" or "0" in binary number code, the language computers think and speak in.) Video-on-demand is but one example—who needs to "shlep" (his word) plastic cassettes when you can just point and click?

Negroponte is a good booster—his smooth palaver betrays years spent on the seminar trail shmoozing (my word) with CEO's. But in his real work in the lab, some of which he reports on here, he has seen how many failures crowd the way; the information superhighway is littered with junk-heaps of ideas that crashed. *Being Digital* is thus in some respects a useful reminder of the way good intentions can go awry, and of the dangers of misplaced technological optimism. Still, in the end Negroponte waxes utopian—and there is no doubting the sincerity of his belief that, whatever the pitfalls, the digital future will be bright.

ESCALATING to another level of both rhetorical overkill and all-out futurism is the latest book by Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave*.² This too is retread material, culled from earlier works by the Tofflers describing the "third wave" of development said to be enveloping us here and now. Basically an extended pamphlet, the new book was commissioned by Newt Gingrich's Progress and Freedom Foundation as a quick guide to future trends, and it bears a glowing foreword by the Speaker.

The Tofflers believe that information technology is making possible a new revolution that will transcend the industrial revolution (that was the "second" wave, following the "first wave" of agriculture). In essence, they take the hoary clichés of earlier economists about our "post-industrial" moment, in which we have moved from a manufacturing-based to a service-based economy, and give them a philosophical twist. The advent of the third wave teaches us that the foundation of all culture and economics is knowledge; therefore, the development, nurturing, and transporting of knowledge—or, generically, information—must constitute the highest achievement of civilization.

In an odd, pint-sized way the Tofflers echo Hegel; it is as if they were suggesting that the transmutation of material dross into digital gold were the ultimate realization of "World-Spirit." And certainly the abstractness of their rhetoric bids fair to compete with that of any 19th-century visionary tract—perhaps this is the feature of their work that appeals to Gingrich, in his role of aspirant Philosopher-King. In any event, the kindest

¹ Knopf, 243 pp., \$23.00.

² Turner, 112 pp., \$7.95 (paperback).

comment one can make on their grand assertions is that it is hard to see how exactly the modest gains in productivity promised by re-engineering are going to bring about the fundamental change in culture they confidently prophesy.

LET us turn now to the doomsayers. As I indicated above, they, at least, take the hype of the technoboosters seriously, if not completely at face value. Thus, according to Jeremy Rifkin in *The End of Work*,³ gains in productivity brought on by information technology and BPR are changing the nature of work so fundamentally that we are headed not for utopia but for a world of catastrophic unemployment and an apocalyptic confrontation between the cognitive haves and have-nots.

Among pretenders to the crown of thorns, Rifkin has superb credentials. He was among the first—and loudest—of the critics of bio-engineering, and he is an ardent environmentalist of the “be-green-or-die” variety. Here, he puts his case together by citing one after another example of businesses that have had to retool with fewer workers—he just never bothers to distinguish between downsizing as a way to reduce costs in the face of shrinking profits and downsizing as a result, specifically, of substituting a computer-related process for human labor. There is no doubt that the latter is happening, but whether it is as widespread a cause of layoffs as Rifkin contends is far from clear. But his book is not a work of sober analysis; it is so much alarmist agitprop.

On the agitprop front, however, Rifkin is a rank amateur compared with Kirkpatrick Sale, who in his latest screed, *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution*,⁴ offers both a short history of the original Luddite movement and a polemical manifesto for our time. Doyen of the New Left, sympathetic chronicler of SDS, contributing editor of the *Nation*, Sale is a veteran water-carrier of the radical Left (subdivision: the culture wars), and it will come as no surprise that, for him, the information age is just one more turn of the same industrial screw which has been grinding down humanity for well over a century.

Like Rifkin, Sale cites statistics galore of a rising tide of unemployment and other social ills that have supposedly been caused by computer-driven automation; again like Rifkin, his scatter-shot method fails to discriminate among the various evils he sees, let alone their causes. But automation is only a small part of the bleak picture he paints. The one ubiquitous evil is the global assault being launched by the “technosphere” on the “biosphere,” or, in Marxese, the insatiable drive of the industrial complex—newly fitted out with digital enhancements—to create consumer demand, thus encouraging the continuous rape of the planet.

The problem for Sale is to make plausible the analogy he draws between the “immiseration” brought on by the first industrial revolution—the original target of Luddite attacks—and that by which we are said to be suffering in our affluent glut. How to get from the Dickensian picture of belching smokestacks and the grime-encrusted faces of laboring urchins in the machine age to the sybaritic waste of modern consumerism? But Sale has studied well at contemporary schools of evidence: just hurl into the courtroom anything that sounds incriminating, however inconsistent, however trivial, however misleading or false. A man on a moral crusade cannot stop for facts.

ASIDE from their worries over the economic and social arenas, some doomsayers also question what is happening to culture as a result of the growth of new technologies. Books on this subject make up a small culture in themselves: they include *The Cult of Information* by Theodore Roszak (who first limned the outlines of the 60’s counterculture), and *Tech-nopoly*, by the “communications theorist” Neil Postman. Latest to enter the fray is the literary critic Sven Birkerts in *The Gutenberg Elegies*,⁵ a plangently titled homage to reading.

This, by far the strangest of the books under review, is a bizarre effort to describe the inner nuances of the reading process; its ultimate aim is to show how “televisual” technology fundamentally disrupts the sanctity of reading. In attempting to capture the way a reader’s at-oneness with the author of a book can be disturbed, Birkerts, a usually sensible reviewer, seems to have come slightly unhinged:

I am reading, caught up in my book, when the phone rings. I am shocked back into the room, forced to contend with some piece of business. Then, a moment later, I am back. I have jumped from one circuit to another. The book is there, waiting, like one of those rare dreams that I half-awaken from and then reenter. Knowing that I have the option of return, this figurative space within the literal space I occupy, changes my relation to that literal space. I am still contained in the world, but I don’t feel trapped in it. Reading creates an imaginary context which then becomes a place of rescue.

Back on earth, Birkerts’s central idea is that the superabundance of information with which we are now daily bombarded keeps us on a “lateral” plane of reality, whereas what our spirits need is more “depth.” Birkerts seems implicitly to be depending here on ideas drawn from the French philosopher Henri Bergson: specifically, the notion of a “*durée*,” a lived, continuous expe-

³ Putnam, 350 pp., \$24.95.

⁴ Addison-Wesley, 320 pp., \$24.00.

⁵ Faber & Faber, 231 pp., \$22.95.

rience of time as opposed to the punctuated and spatialized sense of time encouraged by modern life. For Birkerts, the reading process is a way of "grounding" oneself, of experiencing anew a feeling of depth and duration.

The bibliophile in each of us—that creature who dreams of afternoons of languid meditation by a still pond—may well resonate to Birkerts's musings; yet one is also tempted to reply, rather more directly, "Get a life!" There is little doubt that a creeping erosion of literacy is taking place today—but its causes are complicated, and its connection with expanding information technology is here left completely to Birkerts's impressionistic imaginings.

AND so we come to the sober realists. First up is Thomas K. Landauer in *The Trouble With Computers*.⁶

As a corrective to techno-utopianism, this book is to be heartily recommended. Landauer is a psychologist who has specialized for many years in the "human-computer interface"—in other words, how to make computers more people-friendly. His touchstone principles are "usefulness" and "usability": he wants us to think hard about what computers really are good at doing, whether we are using them appropriately to our advantage, and whether, in our quest to make them a help rather than a hindrance, we are taking into consideration how *people* think and act.

Though he himself has used computers for many years and admires their technical abilities, Landauer remains in many respects unimpressed. Their sheer technical wizardry has bamboozled us, he believes, into associating them with the solving of every conceivable human task. He then proceeds to show in convincing detail just how little computers have contributed to improvement in productivity, especially in the service sector where recent "advances" have been most loudly touted.

Especially pertinent is Landauer's distinction between "phase one" uses of computers—for accounting, inventory control, and process automation—and "phase two" uses in which computers are supposed to enhance and augment human beings. In the former area some gains can indeed be registered; in the latter, computerization has posted no overall productivity gains—and Landauer does a masterly job of analyzing what has gone wrong and why.

The rest of this book is devoted to describing where improvements can be made through the study of actual human needs. Surprisingly, little has been done along these lines by computer experts—who instead tend to assume that other computer users think as they do. As a corollary, and in contrast to boosters and doomsayers alike, Landauer is singularly underwhelmed by "re-engineering," which he regards as another business

fad—like "Total Quality Management"—that will fade as its vaunted promise evaporates.

Probably the most entertaining of the realist books is a set of musings by Clifford Stoll entitled, aptly, *Silicon Snake Oil*.⁷ Stoll is an astronomer who became world-famous with his first book, *The Cuckoo's Egg*, a stirring account of his efforts to track down a computer "hacker" who had illegally broken into the Berkeley network which Stoll was then overseeing. In his new book, Stoll would seem to be biting the hand that feeds him. Its purpose is to dampen enthusiasm for computers, particularly as entertainment and learning devices; to add insult to injury, Stoll, a veteran user of the Internet, also provides a sobering perspective on the limitations and potential abuses of the Net.

The resulting book is as disjointed and in some ways as repetitive as Negroponte's, but many of its anecdotes are compelling and charmingly rendered. Stoll does a much better job than Birkerts, for instance, in explaining why computerized text-searching is no substitute for browsing in a library—it is not just because of the fuzzy humanism of the book culture, but because searches can be done more thoroughly and efficiently the old-fashioned way.

What comes through in Stoll's account, more than any technically persuasive descriptions of "the trouble with computers," is a feeling of genuine humanity. Here, after all, is a scientist, and one exceptionally adept at employing computers in his work, who sees them neither as panaceas nor as poison but simply as useful tools for carefully delimited purposes. But Stoll also has a fine talent for what Thomas Carlyle called "natural supernaturalism"—the wonder, delight, and awe we can experience in the here and now without waiting for supernal miracles. For Stoll, this feeling attaches no less to computers themselves—products of truly marvelous ingenuity and with fascinating physical properties—than to nature in the round. The itinerary of his mental journey as it is detailed in this book, telling much about an engaging and capricious sensibility, serves in its own way as a gentle warning against becoming too obsessed with computers—in fear and loathing or in slavish fascination.

STOLL's is a welcome resting place in the vast terrain of literature about the new technology, where balance and common sense are rare qualities, and where the need to separate hype from reality can all too easily be overtaken by misplaced enthusiasm or equally misplaced dread.

From a business standpoint, it is entirely understandable why telephone and cable-television

⁶ MIT, 425 pp., \$27.50.

⁷ Doubleday, 247 pp., \$22.00.

companies should be interested in pushing the new technology. Their present markets are saturated, and they need either to stimulate new demand for added services or to find new markets. *Pace* Rifkin and Sale, there is nothing evil about this. But will we want what they produce? The notion of calling up any movie you like and speeding it to your TV surely sounds appealing; but then, why has "pay-per-view," which is already available, not been a success?

The answer may have to do with human needs that are not met by the simple availability of a service. Perhaps people have become sated with sitting at home and prefer to go out—to the movies, or even to the video store, where at least they can browse in real space instead of "virtual reality." In the same vein, many people already now take advantage of new home-shopping services, another benefit of the digital revolution; but as they become easier and more common, will huge numbers of people be drawn to them, or will they see advantages in going out to shop? The answer is not so obvious.

Video rentals have been declining for several years now, while "sell-throughs" of low-priced favorites, including movie classics, have increased. This may suggest that people do not always want to be bombarded with greater variety, but rather desire more of what they already know they like. If true, that might disconcert the plans of purveyors of endless "content" in a new computerized entertainment environment. We no longer hear much about the "500-channel" future, even though it is still doable; there is already a lack of

creativity and talent in existing "delivery systems," so why get bigger just for the sake of bigness?

And what about the subtler cultural activities, like writing: will the new technology enhance them, displace them, or destroy them? It is said that computerized word-processing has diminished our sensitivity to style. To some degree, that is probably true; it is easy to produce words on a computer, and then to print them out in pretty typefaces, and since most of what we produce tends to be poor stuff, the result has been a whole lot more of it. On the other hand, the computer is also the best tool ever devised for editing. All it requires is discipline.

Or take literacy. Addictive video games—whether played on multimedia PC's or on specialized game equipment—add another element to the already abundant distractions available to young people (and adults), and in this sense they do contribute to the loss of literacy. But the notion that computers would bring an end to the print age has turned out to be a bad joke: because of computers, there is more paper in use now than ever before.

New media like the Internet and other on-line data services are just gigantic hoards of text. The real problem is what to do with it all. Although computer-aided production adds to the burden of making discriminations, we are not thereby deprived of the power to discriminate. And that is the key: the technology does not, finally, drive *us*. If we attend to this simple truth, we can be enthralled by it but not in thrall to it.

The Engagement

A Story

Pearl Abraham

“WHAT kind of man do you want me to look for?” Ma asks when we’re walking. “You’ll have to rely on me to find the right one; your father has no idea.”

This is her favorite subject these days.

“Not a man like Father,” I tell her. “Not a man with a synagogue that no one needs, and who walks around not knowing what day it is.”

“No; I wouldn’t wish on anyone a man like your father,” Ma agrees. “You need iron nerves to live with a man like your father. Mine are shattered. But what did I know? I liked him. Girls today are smarter. They know more.”

Liked or loved? The Yiddish word for like is the same as for love. I wonder, is there a difference?

I say, “I need someone who gets things done, someone who’s on time.”

“Yes, a *geshikter*, like Mr. Lebowitz. In that family, it’s just the opposite. Mrs. Lebowitz is the slow one. Her husband is always quick, quick. The way I am.”

“I don’t want someone exactly like Mr. Lebowitz; just lively like him.”

“You’re right,” Ma says. “Your husband should have a head like your father and should be *geshikt* like Mr. Lebowitz.”

I don’t answer. I can think of better heads than Father’s. Heads that work more thoroughly, clearly. Heads that don’t care about hasidic dynasties. Heads too involved in Torah to worry about what people say.

Ma looks at me. “What, you don’t think your father has a good head?”

“It’s not that,” I say slowly, carefully. “I just don’t want someone like Father. I want a plain person, not a hasidic rabbi.”

Ma shakes her head. “Father will only accept a *rebbishe* family for his first daughter. That’s what he told the *shadkhan*. He says the first one is most important. The first marriage sets the pattern for the others.”

“The *shadkhan*?” I say. “You mean you spoke to

a *shadkhan*? I told you I’m not interested until after I graduate. I won’t even hear of anyone before then.”

“I know, I know. But it doesn’t hurt to start feeling around. Graduation is not so far away. Chayie Brecher is already engaged. Soon there’ll be others in your class.”

“Chayie is an orphan. She needs a home. She doesn’t count.”

“The *shadkhan* called Father,” Ma says. “It’s better that they call than that we should have to call them. This way you know someone put him up to it. Someone’s interested.” She looks at me. “Don’t you wonder who?”

Her eyes sparkle. She’s so excited that someone called. All she wants is a married daughter; she’s excited about having a married daughter and a son-in-law. With David right after me, she’ll soon have a daughter-in-law too. Then Leah will get married; and still there will be Levi, Sarah, Aaron, and Esther.

“No, I’m not interested,” I say. “I told you already. I want to teach for at least a year before getting married. I’ve said this at least ten times. Why didn’t you tell Father to say that to the *shadkhan*?”

She waves her hand, making nothing I say matter. “There’s no reason to say it. Let the *shadkhan* do his work. A year goes quickly. I wasn’t supposed to tell you. Father said not to mention it. Maybe he was right. You go for your interview and get the job. We’ll take care of things.”

“What, and surprise me one day when I come home? Tell me a boy’s here to see me? You better not pull any *shtick* like that.”

Ma laughs. “Who said anything about a boy coming to see you? It’s all talk now. The boys aren’t lining up at your door. Don’t worry. You’re not so desirable. The *shadkhan* said there are rumors that you’re modern; he asked what kind of stockings you wear. Father convinced him you wear the thickest seams, nothing see-through. Don’t worry. It won’t go so smoothly, it won’t be one-two-three.”

She knows how to go from one side to the other with just a snap of her fingers. First a compliment, then an insult. I don’t trust Father. I think

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he's planning to pull something off. He wants to hurry me into marriage before I know what's what. I'm only a daughter, and not one who will bring honor to this family. He wants to get to David. For David he can choose from the best.

I WEAR my new pale-blue mohair sweater, a long, straight gray-flannel skirt, and my black shoe-boots to my interview with Rabbi Nathan. He tells me he has two grades for me, second and sixth. He wants every teacher to teach one grade in the morning and the other in the afternoon, a full day. I was looking forward to half-days off, but I agree to teach both. There'll be a few meetings before the summer, he says. Before everyone goes away. This will be his first year in this school, too, he says, so everything will be as new to him as to me. We'll learn about the place together, he says.

I like him. He smokes a pipe, and every time he starts to talk, he fumbles, almost drops it, trying to take it out. Sometimes he leaves it in and talks out of the side of his mouth.

He says there will be two other English teachers, both a year older than I am, both from Beth Yaakov, a better school than mine. Based on their experience, he says, their salaries will be higher.

"You don't drive, do you? I can pick you up and bring you back, since I'll be driving there anyway. The first teachers' meeting is two weeks away. The other principal wants to meet us; we're what they call the *goyishe* staff." He laughs. "I understand you know more about these hasidic people than I do. Perhaps you can help me out."

We don't shake hands at the end of the interview, even though it seems as if we should. I smile, and he walks me to the door of his house. I walk down the stairs stiffly, like a teacher, and, at the bottom, turn and see him still standing there, chewing on the end of his pipe watching me. He waves. "See you in two weeks," he says.

I walk home wondering whether he shook the other teachers' hands, whether he made an exception for me, knowing who Father is. People always act as if I am like Father. It is expected that I will be what my parents are.

At home, everyone surrounds me at the kitchen table. Father strokes my cheek the way he did when I was little. He's happy to have me teaching in a hasidic school, even if it's only English subjects. "Teaching is the most honored, the highest profession in the world," he says. "It's the job of every mother. A child learns his first lessons, his first words, even, from his mother."

I'm not sure I like Father being so proud. I tell him two girls from modern Beth Yaakov are teaching with me. He nods, not caring. He's thinking about what he can say to the *shadkhan*: my daughter teaches at the best hasidic school in the world.

Seeing Father happy pleases Ma. Leah's excited about my becoming a teacher, imagining

herself graduating and becoming a teacher too. Esther pulls her finger out of her mouth long enough to say, "Imagine if one day you become my teacher."

"It could happen," Ma says. "If Rachel likes teaching, she can continue doing it after she's married. Even after she has a baby. Nowadays young women work after their first baby. They get a baby-sitter. It's better than staying home all day, cleaning and cooking. Laundry can wait. Besides, with a husband who studies, the money has to come from somewhere."

All this talk about me married, me with babies. As if I'm already engaged. As if it's all happening tomorrow. Right now I have a history test to study for. I have still to graduate high school.

THE *shadkhan* calls back and tells Father people inform him I do not wear stockings with seams. That I've never worn seams. Father says, "I see her every morning and evening. She's wearing seams. I bought them for her myself. People don't know what they're saying."

Ma looks at me, into me, seeing what I don't want her to see. She walks behind Father and beckons me into the hallway.

"Tell me the truth, once and for all. What do you wear?"

I don't answer.

"Listen, it's too late to change anyway. Your reputation is your own. But don't make fools of your parents. Don't have them saying one thing when people know another."

"I wear what I want to wear. What I feel comfortable wearing. I don't wear seams."

Ma takes a deep breath. "So you don't wear seams. Do you at least wear thick stockings, stockings you can't see through?"

I nod. "Yes, I wear opaque beige and taupe stockings."

Ma leaves the room. I open my stocking drawer. She won't find anything there I don't want her to find. She'll see two old pairs of opaque tights without seams. Maybe she's already seen them.

Father comes into the room and closes the door behind him. He sits on the bed.

"Again you didn't listen to your father. For years now you've been walking around wearing what you want and not what your father wants."

"I told you then, I'll never wear stockings with seams. You want stockings with seams, you wear them." Having to tell him this makes me angry. I'm trembling. Why should a daughter wear what her father wants her to wear?

He doesn't answer. He sits for a moment, not saying anything, and then gets up slowly and walks to the door. Before he closes the door, he turns back and says, "I'm very proud of David. The *shadkhan* tells me the head of his yeshiva wants him for a son-in-law."

So that's why Father's in a hurry to get me married.

In the morning, I wear opaque panty hose over my sheer. I don't have to make believe I'm wearing seams anymore. The double layer, opaque over sheer, makes my stockings look even thicker, and Ma's satisfied.

She advises Father. "Tell the *shadkhan* it was your mistake. That it's your wife who wears the seams. You're a man; what do you know about what girls wear? Tell him she wears thick, modest stockings. No seams. Tell him the girls here don't wear seams."

Father keeps his head down. "Who'd want to marry a girl who lies to her own parents, tell me. We'll have to be satisfied with whatever comes. The first that comes."

Ma looks at me, bites her lip, and wrings her hands, to show me how bad things are. I don't stay to listen. I can't stand this constant talk about whom I'll marry. No matter what I say, the talk goes on. I don't care whom I marry. Once married, I at least won't have to worry about it. Married, I'll do and wear what I want. I'll be who I am.

It's October. I walk in from teaching, and Ma says, "The Sklars are breaking a plate tonight. Elke called to invite us."

I sit on my bed. There were only sixteen girls in my graduating class, but every month there's another party or wedding. And with it comes all the well-wishing: God willing, soon we'll be celebrating yours.

Should I say, Not ever, God willing? That would cause a scandal, and then it might be never. I don't know what I want.

"You don't want to be one of the last ones," Ma says, "Like that Landau girl. Who knows how her children will be?"

Henna Landau waited too long, people say. First her twin brothers were in the way, then she was too picky. The *shadkhan* stopped calling. Soon she turned twenty-six and had little choice. She married the only normal one in the Rosenbaum family.

"What about the girls I teach with? They're still single."

"So you're comparing yourself to them now," Ma says. "They come from modern homes. They wait longer. And remember David. We're not going to let Rabbi Blau's daughter go, waiting for you."

David's not yet seventeen, and already his engagement is all set. They're just waiting for me. Only David knows nothing about it.

Father says, "There's no need to tell a yeshiva boy. Why disturb his studies? If we tell him, he'll get nervous, lose sleep. Without sleep, he won't study."

I wonder if David knows anything about girls and babies. About sex. Do boys in yeshiva talk about anything?"

Ma says, "If we marry him off before you, you'll have real problems. As if you don't have enough. The *shadkhan* keeps saying to forget about a rabbi's son for you."

"This is why you have to be careful of your reputation," Father says, pulling his beard so hard it is no wonder it's thin. "The Talmud says a father has a responsibility: he must give his daughter to a scholar and to a good family. It doesn't say anything about a daughter who's given herself a reputation, a daughter who's made things impossible for her father, a daughter who's better known to strangers than to her own father."

He speaks of me the way the prophets speak of whores. As if I've walked the streets, invited men into my bed.

I talk to Ma privately. "I don't need a rabbi's son. I want someone who'll work and earn a living. I don't want to be poor all my life."

She says, "Right away, as soon as you're married, you want him to go off to work? Like some coarse factory worker? Let him study for a few years. Then, after two or three children, I can understand. I also wanted your father to get a real job, bring in a salary. But not right away."

There's a lot to be said for reputations. My reputation will help the *shadkhan* find someone for me, not for Father. How else would he know whom to bring?

Ma says, "Elke's groom is no big deal. He's no great scholar, and his father isn't either. They're plain workers and always will be."

Father would never say this, but he thinks it, he agrees. He and Ma work together, they're a team, with Ma as the bad tongue, as if it's more seemly coming from a woman.

There are advantages to coming from a regular family, like Elke's. She's free. She doesn't have to be a model for the community, to live for what people think and say. And they have a regular income. Her father works for a living; they don't have to count pennies, or depend like Father on book sales and donations. They don't have to wait for the mail, to see if there will be enough to pay for groceries. I don't want gifts all my life. Giving feels better than getting. The Midrash says those who give, love. A wife gives to her husband and grows to love him. A mother gives life to her children and loves them. Takers never learn to love.

During the party, Elke takes me into her bedroom to show me what she's already bought. She's been shopping mostly in Brooklyn, where the groom is from. She shows me a Christian Dior set of sheets I've seen before, orange flowers on a white background. And towels to match. She also bought a set of white eyelet linens.

"I need two more," she says. "Everyone gets married with four sets these days."

The best thing about being engaged is shopping. A bride gets everything new, like starting

life all over again. Elke's room is full of bags. I don't think I'll get as much.

"Did you see him?" she asks.

"Yes. He's so tall, and he's handsome." What I don't say is that he's not romantic. Maybe a man with a beard, a hasidic man, can never be.

Elke smiles and doesn't say anything. She's in love with this man she just met, like love at first sight. Will it happen to me?

On the floor is a box containing the Sanyo vacuum cleaner Ma told me about. Elke opens the box to show me. It's a new design, beige and very shiny. Very Japanese. It looks too clean to clean with.

"It's the lightest vacuum in the world," Elke says. "Lift it."

"It is light," I say. "My mother would like it. Instead of that heavy blue Electrolux she drags around."

"I think your mother wants it for you, not for herself," Elke says. She opens the door to her room, still carrying the vacuum, and beckons Ma over. I look at her, a bride dressed in pale-peach chiffon, carrying a shiny beige vacuum cleaner.

Ma takes it from Elke and raises it, using one hand. "It is very pretty. And light. Like a toy. Will it last?"

Elke nods. "It has a two-year warranty, and it's only \$110. On special." She turns to me. "You should get one now. Before it goes up."

I don't answer. Elke looks toward Ma, as if I am too young to understand.

"I'll call King's Appliances and order it," Ma says.

A FEW days later, the box is on the floor in my closet. Ma paid for it out of her own money. I open it and imagine cleaning my own, very clean apartment. Elke found a place a few blocks away, and she's starting to decorate it. I helped her paint a coffeepot pattern on the kitchen walls one night. It was fun.

Ma's excited. She wants to start buying things and making trips to the city. She says to use my money for clothes and linens, and she and Father will pay for the rest.

"I'm not engaged yet, remember?"

"You could be. Father talked to the *shadkhan* yesterday."

"About what?"

"What do you mean, about what? About a boy. For you."

"I don't want a boy. I want a man."

Ma laughs. "You know what I mean. Anyway, how could he be a man, at your age? But the one we're talking about is a little older. His name is Israel Mittelman."

I look at her.

"He's already twenty-one."

"What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing. He's twenty-one. You just said you want a man, yes?"

Who wants to marry a boy? But asking for a man is as good as agreeing to see one. I hear Father on the phone. They're setting something up, and I'm letting them. It's Elke's apartment. I'm beginning to want things of my own. I want to live on my own. Married is the only way I can be on my own. I have to become Mrs. Someone, Mrs. Mittelman. I try the name out on paper, Mrs. Rachel Mittelman. That's not bad. I want to fall in love, like Elke, like a woman in a novel.

IT'S all set up for Saturday night at eight. The Mittelmans live in Brooklyn, and they're taking the first bus up north after sundown.

"Everyone says the best things about this young man," Father says. "And the family: I know the father way back from Romania; he's a good man, and the family has always had an excellent reputation."

For Father, knowing the family makes up for their not being rabbinical.

I'm trying not to show my excitement. I don't want to seem eager, but I am. I'll finally find out what it's like, meeting a man. Ma's excited too.

I act as if it's no big deal. "I'm only meeting him. I'm not getting engaged."

"What if you really like him? You'll say no?" Ma asks.

"Everyone gets married," Leah says every time we talk about it. "Then you can leave the dishes in the sink all day. When I'm married, we can do things together, go shopping without anyone's permission." She looks at me. "What? You'd rather live with Ma and Father forever?"

We've talked about this so much, we sound like broken records. What she says is true; I can't live here forever. Still, I need her persuasion. I want to be, I let myself be, persuaded. I thought I'd never get married. That I'd just move into my own house and live by myself. But that can't happen.

"Seventeen-year-old girls don't go and live by themselves," Leah says.

"But why not?" I ask. "Why can't I just do what I want?"

"You know that's not possible," Leah says. "You always want what's impossible. Concentrate on what you can get."

She plans to marry a wealthy boy from Brooklyn and wear designer clothes and high heels. This is the country, and people here look it. Leah wants to be like the hasidic girls in Williamsburg, the ones who wear mascara so lightly you can hardly tell. I am sick of lightly.

MA TALKS about nothing else all Shabbat. She and I go for our walk after eating, and she's mostly too out of breath to talk. We just walk. We get

along better now that I'm out of school. Maybe because I'm older. She bought me a white silk blouse with French cuffs, and on Friday we had to go and buy cuff links at the Men's Store. No one in our family has ever worn cuff links.

On our way back we slow down and Ma says, "I'll call Mrs. Fogel. She can send us some fine embroidered tablecloths and napkins from Montreal. Like mine. It's cheaper there."

"I'm not engaged yet, Ma. I'm just seeing someone. And only the first one."

"How many do you think girls see? Ten? Twenty?"

"Ten is a lot more than one. There is an in-between."

"It doesn't matter. You'll need tablecloths someday. And you'll need some nice clothes. It's a good thing you've got some money saved."

Ma's so excited about tonight, about having a married daughter, I finally just let her be. I'm starting to believe I'll just get married, that this is it, that Israel Mittleman's the one.

At sundown, Leah and Sarah offer to do the dishes and clean up so I can go right into the shower. I blow-dry my hair, straight, shoulder-length, with bangs. I put on my new blouse and a navy wool skirt. Ma helps with the cuff links. She's wearing her green wool dress with a matching print silk kerchief.

Ma hurries Leah, Sarah, Esther, and Aaron out to a cab. They're going to 99 Lanes on Route 59. No one's told Ma yet that bowling is modern. We took her there once, and she swung the ball hard and clean and knocked all the pins down, even though she'd never before held a bowling ball in her hand. She and Leah have always been great at sports.

THE Mittelman family arrives five minutes after eight. The grandmother and an aunt too. As if we're having an engagement party. Ma leads them to the table in the dining room, and we all sit. Israel sits near Father. I can see him without looking straight at him. He is thin and well-groomed. His beard is perfectly combed. He wears a black hat like Father's. And a good wool suit coat, better than Father's. His hands are on the edge of the table, only his fingertips show, and they're pink with pressure. I can tell he's very nervous, and I feel sorry for him. I wonder if he's seen any other girls. It's harder to be the man, I think. He has to start talking.

There's a silver bowl filled with fruit on the table and a pitcher of water. Father sits in his regular place, at the head of the table. He peels a tangerine and serves it to Mr. Mittelman. Ma quarters an apple and passes it to Mrs. Mittelman. They talk about the one-and-a-half-hour ride from Brooklyn. There's no bus home tonight, so they're staying over with their friends, the Kleins from Klein's Fruit.

"Do you know them? Do you buy your fruits and vegetables there?" Mrs. Mittelman asks.

Ma nods. "For the most part."

She looks at me and bites her lip. We're both thinking the same thing. Too many people know about this. These meetings should be kept secret until both sides are agreed and an engagement is announced. The Mittelmans should have rented a car or taken a taxi.

Mrs. Mittelman asks about my teaching. She says one of my students is a relative of theirs, Gitty Loeb.

So the Loebes know, too.

During a moment of silence, Ma says, "Let's leave the children alone for a few minutes."

THEY make a lot of noise pushing their chairs back. Ma's the last one out, and before she shuts the door, she smiles and winks. I wait for Israel to speak. I won't be the first one.

"What do you do?" he asks. His teeth are perfectly white.

"I teach the second and sixth grades."

"What do you teach them?"

"All subjects taught in English: math, literature, history, science."

"Would you prefer teaching religious subjects?" he asks.

"No. There are plenty of girls who are good at that. I'm good at English; I like literature."

It would help my reputation if I taught Jewish subjects. I know this is something the Mittelmans have discussed. The *shadkhan* called to ask Ma about it. I was sitting at the kitchen table with her, listening.

Ma rolled her eyes to indicate trouble. She said, "Rachel is smart and she likes to read, like her father. No matter how many Yiddish books we had in the house, there were never enough. For a while, my husband even considered teaching her some Talmud, but they say women shouldn't. Anyway, it can't hurt to marry a smart girl; think of the children."

The way Ma talked, anyone would have thought she'd supported my reading all along.

Israel and I are talking as if neither one of us has heard anything about the other. It's all so set up. His lips, I notice, are very pink. Not like my thick brown lips. He has small features, a small nose, and thin lips, unlike mine. He's quiet, and I realize it's my turn to speak.

"Which yeshiva do you go to?"

"I'm not in yeshiva anymore. I study with the older men, in the synagogue."

I should've known that. He's already twenty-one, past yeshiva age. Most boys get married at eighteen. I can't ask, Why did you wait so long? "Do you like being out of yeshiva?"

He nods, I wait for more, for a reason. He doesn't say anything.

"Why? What's good about it?" I ask.

He says slowly, "I like not having to report to anyone and not being tested every week. I like coming and going like an adult." I watch his mouth, the way his mustache spreads so straight and black above his lips.

He mentions Gitty Loeb, who told his mother about the games I have them play in class to help them memorize. He says, "Tell me the rules of the game."

I explain the rules of *Go Fish* and *Twister* for learning body parts and colors.

He smiles. "Where do you get such good ideas?"

"From *Teacher's Magazine*. I subscribe."

"You sound like a very good teacher."

I know he says this to flatter me. Still, it works; I am flattered.

We talk about our families. He has two brothers and one sister. He tells me his youngest brother slipped and told a friend about tonight. Before they left home the phone rang. It was the boy's mother, calling to wish the Mittelmans a *mazel tov*. Israel laughs.

I don't think it's funny. I don't even smile. He's too sure of tonight. Who said anything about getting engaged?

We actually talk about the weather.

Then we're both quiet for what seems like forever, and I push my chair back slightly as a sign that our meeting is over.

He gets up too. I walk into the kitchen, and he goes down the hall, to the boys' room, which today serves as a living room.

I find Ma behind the kitchen door; she's been listening in.

"Well?" she asks, her face happy and hopeful.

"Well, what?"

"Is it a yes or a no?"

"I don't know."

"You can't send them home like that, not knowing. They came all this way. Especially the old grandmother."

"She shouldn't have come," I say.

"You can't blame her. She's old; she wants to be at her first grandchild's engagement. They're expecting to break a plate tonight."

Father walks in. "Nu? What do you say?"

"She doesn't know," Ma says.

"That's not saying no," Father says.

"I'm not giving an answer tonight," I announce in a loud voice so the Mittelmans will hear. "I need time. Send them home."

"Shhh," Ma says and closes the door. "We can wait till tomorrow," Father says, looking at Ma. I can tell he's warning her not to push too hard. "But you'll have to decide by tomorrow."

I say good-night to the Mittelmans and to Israel, and just as they're finally leaving, Leah and the kids arrive home. Sarah and Aaron are arguing loudly about who's better at bowling.

Leah comes in. "He looks OK," she says.

"Skinny but kind of cute. Not manly. A little like Father, don't you think? Did you say yes?"

In books, the men are always tall and dark, or tall, strong, and blond. Not at all like Israel. He does look like Father, thin and sensitive. His hair is black, too. But his face is pale, unlike Father's brown skin.

"That's what I fell in love with," Ma always says. "His dark skin like a Yemenite."

AFTER the Mittelmans are gone, Father prods again, "Nu? What do you say?"

"Stop asking so much, or I'll just say no."

"What don't you like about him?" Father asks.

"Nothing. There's nothing wrong with him. He's fine."

"Do you still want to see another boy?" Ma asks. "Even though it won't look good for you to say no to the Mittelmans. Too many people know about this. And if you see someone else, you'll have to say yes."

"And meet another whole family? Mothers and grandmothers? Why did they have to bring the grandmother? It's embarrassing."

"There's no need to meet another family. Make this one the one. God sent you this family, a good family," Father says, smiling and trying to catch my eye.

I don't smile back, and look away. He's worse than Ma. He doesn't want to give me any choice. He wants this to happen. I could say no just to show I'm in control. But I don't know what I want. Saying no to the Mittelmans would mean that I'd have to say yes to the next one. And who knows who the next boy will be. By then the Mittelmans will be insulted. Or Israel will get engaged to someone else. He's older than most boys; his parents want him to get married.

And if I say no to the next one, people will say I refuse boys for no reason, like the Adler girl. Everyone was saying, Who does she think she is, a princess? She finally married a boy who'd been turned down by at least ten girls because he's short and fat. Serves her right, people said. About me, they'd say worse.

I EXPECT some sign from God all night. I don't deserve it, only the most virtuous people can hope for that, but still I expect it. I fall asleep imagining being held and kissed, and I wake up feeling thrilled. I don't remember any dreams; there's nothing to tell me what to do. But I'm excited. I try to imagine Israel in bed with me and can't. He's not the type. I wonder how he would start. How does anyone start such things?

In the kitchen Ma's at the counter. Father's in the synagogue. The others are in school. "Should I see another man?" I ask her.

"Not if you like Israel. After your father, I refused to see anyone else. There was a Belgian

boy, from a wealthy family, and I said no because I'd already made up my mind to marry your father."

Ma had an opportunity to marry a Belgian boy, a foreigner. I'm seeing someone from regular old Brooklyn, even if he is from fancy Borough Park.

"Do you think you made the right choice?" I ask.

She looks at me, surprised. "You mean marrying your father? Of course. Look at what a beautiful family I have. Do you know how many women envy me all this?"

"What about all your complaints? You used to complain a lot. About not having enough money. About being a rabbi's wife."

She waves her hand, making none of that matter, and sips her coffee. "Those first years were hard; it was a hard life. Feeding, clothing, and educating seven of you."

"You might have had it easier with a wealthy Belgian husband."

Ma sips and swallows. "I love your father."

FATHER comes home, and we eat breakfast together. We both dunk our bread in the soft-boiled egg yolk. Ma started a new diet today; she's had her wheat germ and milk already, and now she's on her second cup of coffee. She wants to fit into her raw-silk dress for the engagement party. She wants to look as good as thin Mrs. Mittelman, with her blond wig and her little black hat on top. Ma can never look as good in the kerchief she wears. When I'm married I'm expected to wear a wig with a hat, like Mrs. Mittelman. Father says why not do even better, wear what your mother wears. He doesn't know that after I'm married, when he and Ma can't tell me what to do, I won't even wear the hat.

Ma knows. She says, "Let her wear a covered wig, and at least you'll know she'll stay with it. Not change after. Like Borough Park girls. They're more concerned with how they look than with God or their parents. It's hard to believe that after their first night with their husband they can be so hard, so unchanged, so concerned with just looks."

As if sex with a man is supposed to make you better, softer, more religious. Ma thinks that after I'm married I'll start wearing seams if Israel asks me.

She says, "Wait and see. Plenty of girls do. They're in love with their husband, and he just has to ask them at the right moment and they do it. A smart boy asks right after the first night; it's the best time to get the girl to agree."

I plan not to change one bit. I don't even want to wear a wig. I think if all women refused to shave and cover their heads, the rabbis would have to rethink the laws, change them. But I don't know anyone who agrees with me.

Leah says, "That's ridiculous. It will never happen."

When I talk to Elke, she says, "I don't mind shaving my hair. Everyone does it. You should be happy to get rid of yours. You're always complaining about how fine it is."

"I talked to Mr. Mittelman in the synagogue this morning," Father says. "He's very understanding. He suggests another meeting this afternoon, and if it's yes, we can break the plate and they can take the four- or six-o'clock bus home. He says he understands a young girl wanting to be more certain."

I like Mr. Mittelman for understanding. Still, what is there I could see better the second time around? You don't get to know a person sitting at a table and talking or going out on a date. It takes time. It takes forgetting that you're doing it.

Father looks at me. "So what do you say to a second time?"

"What for?" I say. "What else is there to see?"

He smiles and looks satisfied. He knows I'm interested. He reaches over and puts his hand on top of mine and says, "Then make this second meeting the engagement."

I CALL Elke's house. Her mother says she's at her new apartment.

I walk over. She's painting the woodwork in the bathroom. I sit on the edge of the tub and watch.

"Are you at all nervous, Elke?"

She puts her head to the side.

"I mean, how did you know he was the one you wanted? He was the only one you saw."

"I just did," Elke says. "He's good-looking. And he was funny when we talked. And I knew I didn't want him to see any other girls."

Things seem so easy for her. I'm too serious. Elke would have laughed with Israel about the phone call before he left home, she would've thought it funny.

She sits back with the brush in her hand and leans against the sink. "It's not the newest thing in the world, you know. People get engaged and married. It's not such a big deal. Just do it. We'll have fun being newlyweds."

"What about love?"

"It comes after. Everyone I know says so." We look at each other. "You think too modern," she says. "You always did. You always did things that were too modern for your family. Too modern even for the most modern girls in our class. And you're from a *rebbe's* family. Everyone in school talked about it. Even Leah thinks so. She says you just never know when to stop, that you have no limits."

I think it's easier for Elke because she doesn't think about love in novels. She hates reading. She doesn't know any tall, dark men in boots. She thinks only about the hasidic way, real life. For the first time, I see a reason not to read.

I say, "It's not as if I'm about to get engaged. I'm just thinking about seeing him again."

"That's getting engaged, in hasidic families. It happens very quickly. One day you meet, the next day you're engaged. Sometimes the same day. Just do it; you'll have to do it sooner or later anyway."

Elke is always ahead, a veteran. I used to think things would be different for me. That my life would be different. But it isn't. I teach grade school like all the others. I'll get engaged like all the others. Get married. Maybe it's better doing things the way everyone does. You know exactly how it goes. Besides, I don't even know what I really want to do that's different. Or what there is to do. Even modern girls get married eventually. They just do it later. They go out on dates instead of sitting in. Then they get engaged and married. I thought there'd be more things a person could do, more choices. But there's nothing else. People get married and start living their own lives. Married is the only way to live on my own, in my own apartment.

At four, Israel comes again. He looks exactly the same, and I wonder if he's even changed his shirt. This time, only his father is with him. The women are waiting at the Kleins'. Maybe Ma said something.

We talk. Today he looks into my eyes, and I notice his deep-blue eyes. They're beautiful. I don't know how I missed them last night. I ask him where he wants to live. We're looking at each other. I can see myself in his eyes, and I think maybe this is love.

He answers slowly. "Wherever you decide."

I wish his answer were more definite, a name, Borough Park. I want him to take me away to another city. I want him to be strong, a man in a novel. He isn't. But his mind is made up about one thing: he wants to be engaged to me. My reputation isn't stopping him. My hesitation, seeing him a second time, hasn't upset him. Maybe it's the family I come from. He wants to marry into a rabbinical family.

"I think I want to live in Borough Park," I tell him. "Somewhere different."

He nods. "We can. But for the summer, we should rent an apartment here. The city empties out in the summer. My parents move out to the country. It's not very nice there in the hot summer."

I think that's a good idea. I was a lifeguard last summer, and I could do it again. I could continue earning money. I tell him that, and he asks me about lifeguarding.

"You must swim very well," he says, looking at me, admiring me.

WHEN I come into the kitchen, Ma has that question on her face, and I know I don't want to say no, I'm tired of saying

no. I don't wait for her to ask. I decide to trust her. I can trust her more than Father. "You think I should say yes?" I ask.

She nods.

"OK, yes," I say, thinking how easy it is to say it. Yes, yes, yes. There's nothing else to say when you say yes.

Ma kisses me on the cheek and calls Father. He kisses me on the forehead. Mr. Mittelman telephones his wife. I call Elke, and she quickly comes over.

Ma brings out the chipped china plate she's been saving for me, her first daughter, and wraps it in a dish towel. For some reason, we're all standing in the kitchen.

When Mrs. Mittelman, the grandmother, and Mr. and Mrs. Klein arrive, Ma hands the plate to the old lady as an honor. She looks around slowly and lifts her hands up as if she's too close to the ground. A plate that doesn't break is a bad omen. If it doesn't break, I think it will be a sign from God. A sign to say no. The plate crashes to the floor, and we hear it shatter. Everyone says *mazel tov*. The fathers shake hands, the mothers kiss. The Mittelmans kiss their son. The grandmother kisses her grandson, my future husband, Israel. I watch how he bends down to help her reach him. Elke hugs me. The phone rings. Everyone arrives home from school, and Leah and Sarah take turns answering and making calls. Mrs. Mittelman also gets on the phone. Aaron and Esther are underfoot.

Esther wants to know if I'm going to have a baby now. Elke explains that it takes a while. Listening to her, I remember David and Levi in yeshiva. They know nothing about this. I send Aaron to tell Leah to call them. She's so excited, she's calling everyone she can think of. Leah looks at me from across the room and points to her watch to indicate it's not the right time to call. They have set hours for everything there. I wonder how long before David gets engaged, whether Father will even wait until after my wedding. I'm almost eighteen. David is already seventeen, and Father says a boy should be under the wedding canopy before he's eighteen.

Ma unties the dish towel and hands everyone a piece of the plate. She saves the largest piece, a piece from the center, for me. It has three tiny pink flowers. Mrs. Mittelman asks if I want it set in gold as a necklace charm. We look at my piece of the plate. It's large enough for a round or oval setting. All the brides in Brooklyn are doing it now, she says. I give it to her, and she puts it in her fancy black purse with a long strap, like younger women wear, not like Ma's old-lady bag with handles.

Ma tells Mrs. Mittelman my ring size is five. For my engagement party, I will receive a diamond ring and a big silver vase filled with roses. That's what Elke got. Bridal gifts conform to the latest

trends, because mothers-in-law are afraid to differ. Receiving fewer or cheaper gifts could be taken as an insult. As a bride, I can expect a gift for every holiday that comes up between now and my wedding. I don't care about any of this, but Ma says to keep my mouth shut. She received a pearl instead of a diamond ring, and she will never let anyone forget it. Grandfather said it was because he'd seen dirt under her fingernails.

"A complete lie," Ma says. "Can you imagine me with dirty fingernails? He just needed an excuse, that stingy old man."

Ma and Mrs. Mittelman discuss a date for the engagement party and decide on a month from now, on a Sunday, my day off from school. Ma says we'll do it in the new synagogue next door, the women in the women's section and the men in theirs. She explains that things are still a little raw, construction isn't entirely finished, but it's large enough for the party, if not the wedding, and it's bright.

Before they all leave, Israel comes over, and Leah and Elke move away quickly. With his eyes lowered for modesty, he wishes me *mazel tov* and a good night. This is impressing Ma, I know. At the last minute, he looks into my face and smiles.

I wonder if he's thinking of what I'm thinking. Of us kissing. Of us in bed. I can't imagine us together. I'm not sure what men think about. I always knew what the women in stories felt, I could understand what they felt, but I don't know anything about men.

Mr. and Mrs. Mittelman wish me a good night; Mrs. Mittelman kisses me, then I kiss the grandmother. Mr. Mittelman bows his head and smiles. Until I'm married, Father is the only man allowed to kiss me. Then my husband.

From the kitchen window, I watch them pile into Father's car. He's driving them to Route 59, where the bus to New York City stops. Ma is at the front door, waving. It's a starry dark night, the moon is full and round, at the beginning of her month. I'll have to start keeping track of my month, count the days to my period and away from it. Husband and wife are allowed to touch each other only two weeks of the month. There are five to seven days of menstruating, a seven-day count of clean days, then the ritual bath. I have to find the right day for my wedding, before my period begins again.

In the Talmud, there are three kinds of virtuous women: girl, wife, and mother. I will be a girl for four more months.

The Spirit of Liberty and The Spirit of Religion

Adam Wolfson

THAT the American people are a religious people is plain. But it is just as plain that they do not want clerics dictating their politics or politicians dictating their religion to them. The undeniable tension between what Tocqueville called the "spirit of liberty" and the "spirit of religion" is in some sense the saga of America, and it is even what makes America great. It has also, rather suddenly, come to be regarded as the noose that may yet strangle the life out of the Republican party.

The dire predictions—which are not unmixed with a certain anticipatory glee—come most obviously from the direction of the liberal media and leading figures in the Democratic party. For some years now, a methodical campaign has been conducted from these quarters to convince economic conservatives, moderate country-club Republicans, libertarians, and Reagan Democrats that the GOP has fallen into the hands of religious zealots.

This was the Democrats' strategy even before last November's congressional elections; it was epitomized by Congressman Vic Fazio of California, who warned that the "fire-breathing Christian radical Right" would turn out to be "devastating" to the Republican party's electoral prospects. In the event, of course, it was not; but this has not stopped others from issuing similar predictions of imminent Republican perdition at the polls.

Thus, even before the Christian

Coalition released its "Contract With the American Family" in late May, a *New York Times* editorial had blasted the document as a "theocratic" and "radical" "experiment in social control." Ever eager to convince its readers that the Republican party has become a conventicle, the *Times* argued that the Contract, which favors such relatively straightforward items as school choice, a tax credit for families with children, restrictions on pornography, and requirements that convicted prisoners study and work, "ought to terrify Republicans who believe in their party's traditional concern for individual liberty."

Some Republicans, indeed, are beginning to show signs of being terrified—especially now that the race for the presidency has begun in earnest. Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, sent shivers up many a Republican spine when he insisted a few months ago that unless both candidates on the GOP presidential ticket were pro-life, religious conservatives might sit out the elections on the sidelines. A more recent source of alarm is the provision in the Contract With the American Family calling for a constitutional amendment to protect religious expression; many Republicans believe that the First Amendment already protects "the free exercise" of religion, and that the Constitution should not recklessly become the plaything of special-interest groups.

Even more worrisome are the demands of James Dobson, president of Focus on the Family, and Gary Bauer, president of the Fam-

ily Research Council, that presidential candidates come out forthrightly on "their" issues or risk losing the support of their troops. Thus, despite a solid voting record, Senator Phil Gramm was put on notice that unless he began sounding more like a preacher, religious conservatives would desert him. Warnings have been issued of potential defections to a third-party candidate or to the candidacy of Patrick J. Buchanan—whose own comment on the Christian Coalition's Contract With the American Family was that it should have been "bolder."

ARE the differences separating "religious conservatives" from other Republicans too great for one party to bridge? There would certainly seem to be grounds for thinking so. According to the Republican strategist William Kristol, religious conservatives inhabit a "parallel culture," largely unknown and ignored by other conservatives. They read different holy books (the Bible versus, one supposes, Frederick A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*); they attend different parties; they listen to different music.

And as there is a social divide, so, too, there is an apparent political divide: among the country's 15 to 40 million voters who identify themselves as conservative evangelicals, such "moderate" or economic conservatives as Governor William F. Weld of Massachusetts, Governor Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey, and Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania hardly exercise appeal. Until his recent gestures in their direction, the same could also be said of Senator Bob Dole, who in 1987 remarked that he preferred to spend his Sundays not in church but watching television news shows and riding his exercise bike. Only Speaker Newt Gingrich, shadow presidential candidate, seems to attract the admiration of both religious

and economic conservatives. But it remains to be seen how this self-described "modernizer" and fan of the futurist Alvin Toffler can at the same time stand for traditional morality.

THE issue boils down to this: where economic conservatives want a less censored, less regulated—one might even say less governed—society, religious conservatives want a more traditional society in which abortion will be illegal, school days will begin in prayer, and traditional values will be defended and promoted by the state.

All that having been said, however, it is also important to note that pollsters have had a notoriously difficult time defining the line between religious and economic conservatives. David W. Moore, of the Gallup poll, has concluded that on most issues, adherents of the religious Right "look no different in their views from other conservatives who are Republican or independent." True, they tend to stand out on the issues of abortion, homosexuality, and religion; but even here the differences hardly constitute an outright clash. Thus, a surprising 59 percent of religious conservatives agree that abortion should be legal in some instances, a figure that is only slightly lower than the 62 percent of other conservatives who feel the same way. The line of division is not so much philosophical as tactical: unlike other conservatives who would gladly take measures to limit but not altogether to prohibit abortion, many leaders of the religious Right insist on a constitutional amendment banning the practice outright.

Consider another example: according to the conventional wisdom, economic conservatives are eager to create an inclusive, big-tent Republican party, one which could also attract new voters who now feel that the GOP is inimical to their interests; standing in the way are religious conservatives, with their intolerance and their maximalism. There is something to this—but again, it is only part of the story.

If, for instance, there is any-

thing missing from the present Republican coalition, it is support from America's minorities, blacks in particular. Yet blacks as a group are *more* religious than the general population: they tend to be more devout than whites, to show higher rates of church attendance, to be more involved in church activities, and to be more likely to take the Bible literally. According to Gallup, 20 percent of blacks even embrace the label "religious Right" (without necessarily sharing its political positions). Although such voters show no marked inclination to switch parties at the moment, an appeal to them on the basis of shared religious sentiments might well be more effective than an agenda of tax cuts and fiscal responsibility alone.

INDEED, it is impossible to imagine any successful majority political party in America that is at the same time completely devoid of religious sentiment. Even the thoroughly secularized and secularizing Democratic party of today strives for at least the appearance of religious feeling, as when President Clinton invokes a "new covenant," or the First Lady feebly attempts to create something called "the politics of meaning," or liberal Democratic spokesmen make vague references to "the sacred," "the holy," "the spiritual."

And if that is true of the Democratic party of today, the Democratic party of yesterday was positively comfortable with religious tropes. Martin Luther King, Jr. was not accused of religious bigotry, or of violating the principle of separation of church and state, when he declared in his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" that a "just law" is one that "squares with . . . the law of God." On the contrary: many liberals saw then, as even many moderate and economic Republicans today do not, the crucial role played by religion in the everyday lives of Americans, as well as in the civic life of the nation.

Of course, over the succeeding decades liberals would lose sight of this elementary fact, and the decline of the Democratic party is not unconnected with its determined march into a thoroughgo-

ing secularism. As Nathan Glazer was perhaps the first to point out, the new secularizing spirit of the Democrats would itself become a critical factor in the emergence of the religious Right on the political scene.

Not content with a secular state, post-1960's liberalism attempted to secularize civil society as well. From now on, prayer in the schools would be considered an illiberal imposition of religion by the state; but sex education, the handing-out of condoms, and the promotion of such oddities as "values clarification" and "situation ethics" would be considered within the powers of that same state. It was this expansion of state power that sparked what Glazer called "a defensive reaction of the conservative heartland."

As has often been observed, when the religious Right became involved in politics, most conspicuously in Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, it did so not in the spirit of a political crusade but as a counter-reaction to the interference of state authority in the sensitive region of "values." What these religious and social conservatives wanted was not to run the country their way, but most of all to be left alone. It took the genius of Ronald Reagan—himself a former Democrat—to help politicize this sentiment and fold it into the message of the Republican party.

THESE days, however, and notwithstanding some reassuring poll data, of the kind I have cited above, what was folded does seem to be unfolding. Although the press and the Democrats suggest that the divisive impulse stems wholly from the camp of the religious Right, polarizers exist on both sides.

It is true that religious conservatives' vision of the common good has sometimes seemed a thinly disguised and narrowly conceived sectarian grab for power, and their political agenda to involve little more than proclaiming the U.S. a "Christian nation," castigating homosexuality, and comforting themselves with the thought that God does not hear the prayers of Jews; for some religious conservatives,

outlawing abortion remains the only significant issue, certainly more important than creating a Republican majority.

For their part, however, many economic conservatives have difficulty imagining limits to individual freedom, and some are even reflexively hostile to religion. For example, in 1992 several Republican moderates, including Senators Nancy L. Kassebaum of Kansas, Warren B. Rudman of New Hampshire, John H. Chafee of Rhode Island, along with Arlen Specter, founded the Republican Majority Coalition. The aim of this group was to give Christian zealots the boot; its manifesto declared that economic and fiscal conservatism should be the sole "defining principle of the Republican party."

So THE divisions are real, and it remains to be seen whether they can be overcome. But there is, I believe, reason for guarded optimism.

For one thing, some economic and moderate conservatives do recognize that many of the problems America faces today—welfare dependency, a decline of the work ethic, illegitimacy, a coarsened culture—cannot be solved simply by tending the fisc. The minimal state they dream of can only be realized if the social building blocks—families, schools, churches, communities—are in good working order. To put it simply, without a revived and remoralized civil society, small government is an impossibility—and, paradoxically, big government almost a necessity. As Doug Bandow of the libertarian Cato Institute recently wrote, advocates of the minimal state need to recognize that virtue "plays a critical role in undergirding a free society" and that "private mediating institutions, particularly churches, . . . need to retake their leading role in teaching virtue and meeting social problems."

As for religious conservatives, many of them have been showing an increased understanding that the public good extends beyond the goal of converting the infidels. The same Ralph Reed who wants a pro-life presidential ticket has also acknowledged that the "pro-family movement" must learn to "speak

to the concerns of average voters in the areas of taxes, crime, government waste, health care, and financial security," and by doing so himself he has helped to build bridges between the Christian Right and other groups within the Republican coalition. Like most of the provisions in the Contract With the American Family, Reed's recent book, *Politically Incorrect*, is an homage more to the classical bourgeois (one used to call them liberal) virtues of industriousness, diligence, frugality, and toleration than to Christian revivalism.

Most significantly, Reed has edged in the direction of what I would characterize as the Founders' view of religion, preaching toleration of other faiths and rejecting the once-dominant conservative view of America as a "Christian nation."

TO GET a sense of the Founders' view of religion, one might begin by contrasting it to the view of those religious conservatives who believe that every problem has a constitutional solution, or who think that electing one of their own to the presidency, or securing prayer in the public schools, will put an end to America's moral decline. It is from the ranks of such people that Patrick J. Buchanan draws strength in his quixotic campaign for the White House. Buchanan's mix of theology and politics, according to which America's various problems are all aspects of a "religious war," has the undeniable appeal of simplicity and radical coherence. But the alternative he offers—politics transmogrified into a religious crusade—is also quite alien to the American tradition.

There was a time, prior to the Enlightenment, when all wars *were* religious wars. Putting an end to this form of fanatical bloodshed was one of the reasons the Founders separated church and state. By purposely constructing a distinct secular realm, the early American Enlighteners, though they certainly did not aim to eradicate religious belief, did hope to calm religious zeal. Biblical or religious imagery was not to be erased from American discourse, but it was

also not to be used, as Buchanan uses it, to divide and vilify. Rather, as George Weigel has written, America's greatest statesmen have invoked biblical language in public discourse "to call [us] to a deeper reflection on the promise and perils of the American democratic experiment."

In other words, the American ideal of separation of church and state is meant to gratify the desire for both the spirit of liberty *and* the spirit of religion. The Declaration of Independence captures this dual heritage in its opening paragraph, avoiding sectarian religious references but explicitly invoking the universal "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Jefferson, that most ardent believer in reason, affirms in the Declaration that the right to liberty presupposes a Creator (though, despite the claim of some religious conservatives, it is questionable whether he had in mind the God of Genesis).

AS TOCQUEVILLE later observed, while religion does not give Americans their singular taste for liberty—for that, we have John Locke to thank—"it singularly facilitates for them its use." No President in recent memory has expressed this complex tension better than Ronald Reagan. Unlike Buchanan, Reagan celebrated the "secular" realm—that is, "our faith in the ideals of democracy, of free men and free markets." Again unlike Buchanan, he extolled America's "principles," by which he meant our secular "commitment to freedom and personal liberty." Yet in defending the spirit of liberty, Reagan also did not neglect the spirit of religion. Echoing many of the Founding Fathers, he posited that liberty would prosper best in a nation of sincere believers. "The American experiment in democracy," he correctly observed, "rests on this insight."

If the Republican party is ever to achieve a lasting public mandate, as opposed to occasional tactical victories at the polls, its two dominant elements will need to coalesce. This will involve giving both the spirit of liberty and the spirit of religion their due. For that to happen, economic

conservatives need to recognize that liberty presupposes a moral, even a religious, citizenry. And religious conservatives need to

recognize that considerable areas of our shared civic lives can and must be understood without reference to Scripture. If the two

should jointly and severally succeed, the ultimate beneficiary would be not only the Republican party but our liberal republic.

Israel: Hallucinations of Peace

Fiamma Nirenstein

DESPITE its notoriously defective electoral system, Israel is a country with an authentic government and a real opposition, a country where the major parties regularly contend to form governments; where the judiciary performs its duties without the slightest hesitation, rendering decisions that regularly overturn government policy and state laws; where the press is free to attack, criticize, and tear down. On television talk shows, guests shout and gesticulate: religious against secular Jews, settlers from Judea and Samaria against spokesmen for Peace Now; army generals against mothers of soldiers at the front; Israeli Arabs against representatives of Likud. A joke making the rounds is that there is not a taxi driver in the country who does not consider himself well-enough informed to take the place of Yitzhak Rabin or Shimon Peres. And it is true that Israelis at all levels of society debate public matters with the thoroughness, vehemence, and knowledgeability of professional politicians.

Israel, in other words, is a vibrant, restless democracy—the only one in its region and, as it happens, the only democracy in the world that is at war. Since the

beginning of the “peace process” in September 1993, it has been undergoing a phase of its existence that is at once fascinating and deeply troubling. It is a dramatic phase, laden with implication.

Not long after that moment in September 1993 when Prime Minister Rabin, his face contracted into impassivity, his body tilted backward, touched the hitherto untouchable hand of his enemy, an Israeli journalist friend of mine made a pilgrimage to the Golan Heights in the company of a friend of his, a Syrian intellectual. In the Yom Kippur War of 1973, my friend had fought in the fierce tank battles on the Golan; almost his entire company had been killed or mutilated. His Syrian companion had also taken part in that war, in that place.

Now there was talk of the Golan being returned to Hafez Assad, the Syrian dictator. But my friend was interested only in peace. “I’ve never communicated so intensely with another human being,” he reported back to me, “as when we walked together through that undergrowth and amid all those stones, remembering our dead companions.”

My friend is not alone: hundreds of writers and intellectuals and just plain Israeli citizens have plunged into contact with any and every newly accessible place in the Arab world, rushing to burst free of the geographic claustrophobia that has gripped the Jewish state since

its founding. Israeli Jews of North African or Iraqi or Libyan or Egyptian descent have in particular gone hunting wherever they can for their roots, for the odors and sounds of their childhood. Erasing from mind the bloody history of persecution that was responsible for their being in Israel in the first place, they have proudly positioned themselves to serve as a bridge between Israeli and Arab culture, as self-styled heralds and emissaries of the new and peaceful world aborning. Their fever is shared—to some degree, it was even sparked—by Foreign Minister Peres himself, who in books and articles and speeches has imagined a “New Middle East,” a technological-cultural-economic utopia made up of Israel and the Arab nations and linked by computers, mass media, open markets, books, and the arts.

For months now, Israeli TV has incessantly mirrored the liberal public’s love affair with the idea of peace: images of Arafat with his *kefiya*, without his *kefiya*, sitting at the table with his family, with his wife Suha who speaks French and is dressed by Chanel; Arafat laughing and Arafat suffering and even Arafat asleep with his mouth half-open. These images have all but obliterated the older image of Arafat the mastermind of the 1972 Munich massacre of Israeli athletes and other bloody deeds. The earnest effort of consciousness-raising has reached the point where one

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talk-show host, reflecting on alleged secret attempts over the years to eliminate Arafat in Lebanon or Tunisia, concluded that all along Israel had really wanted to keep him alive, as its eventual partner in peace.

In short, what the liberal Israeli public has done over the past year and a half has been to create for itself a dizzying and self-propelled "discourse" of peace. This discourse is highly iconographic and imagistic: the White House lawn, the Nobel Peace Prize, Peres walking with Arafat hand in hand, Rabin and King Hussein kissing on the cheek. Most bizarrely, it has perpetuated itself almost unchecked against the background of a campaign of Arab terrorism which, since "peace" broke out, has claimed the lives of more Israeli Jews than in any period of the same length in the country's history, and which has eroded support for the "peace process" itself among many Israeli citizens.

THOSE Arabs officially at peace with Israel—Egypt, Jordan, the PLO, some of the countries of North Africa and the Gulf—share a problem: Islamic fundamentalism. But they have shown no sign of repudiating the values of their internal enemy—certainly not where Israel, their erstwhile external enemy, is concerned. Nor, evidently, have they felt any need to rehabilitate the image of Israel within their own societies and cultures.

Quite the contrary: in Egypt, Israel is a country about which no mainstream journalist seems capable of writing without resorting to anti-Semitism. It is a country that Egyptians do not even put on their maps of the Middle East; that President Hosni Mubarak refuses to visit; and that Egyptian intellectuals regularly vilify. If, in Israeli public schools, the Ministry of Education has seen to it that a substantial peace curriculum is in place, starting in the primary grades, in Egyptian schools what is taught about Israel is, precisely, nothing.

As for the situation in Gaza, the schools there are run entirely by religious extremists. Despite the

fact that the greatest threat to Arafat's life comes from the Islamic Jihad, no one dares openly cross those whom a high-ranking Palestinian police official has called "boys ready to give their lives for the honor of their people." Arafat himself, between embraces with Shimon Peres, is fond of reassuring his Palestinian audiences that Jihad is part and parcel of the history and the future prospects of their common struggle.

Even more moderate Muslims, like the *mufti* of Saudi Arabia, who have tried on occasion to reconcile Islam with the idea of peace with Israel, are repeatedly forced to qualify and backtrack. Peace with Jews (and Christians) is permissible in Islam, they are reminded, but only when the non-Islamic party takes a subordinate position. Israel, however, in addition to having committed the unpardonable sin of Jewish political power, is also the bearer of enemy—that is, Western—values. And so even those elements of the Arab and Islamic world that have not kept aloof from the "peace process" tend to regard peace with Israel not as a good in itself but as a necessary evil—one that might yet be affected by future shifts in power, including those to be brought about by the workings of Islamic fundamentalism. Indeed, it is *only* by thinking in such categories that Muslims can remain true, as it were, to themselves.

THIS is not the only salient point of difference between the way "peace" is regarded in the Arab world and the way it is experienced by Israelis in their democratic euphoria. As a byproduct of the lust for peace, something even more alarming is now occurring in the Jewish state.

Freed, as they now think, from the yoke of war, from the problem of national life and death, leftist Israeli intellectuals have embarked on a ferociously self-critical revision of the entire structure of the nation's founding myths: from the behavior of Palestinian Jewry during the Holocaust to the conduct of the 1948 War of Independence to the actions and beliefs of the great humanist warriors like David

Ben-Gurion, Moshe Dayan, and Golda Meir who led the state in its infancy and childhood.

Thus, Israeli television viewers were recently treated to a mini-series debunking Hannah Szenes, the twenty-year-old girl from Jewish Palestine who in 1944 parachuted behind Nazi lines to try and save a few Jewish lives and was caught and executed by the Germans. Ben-Gurion has been portrayed as a cynic, utterly detached during the war years from the fate of his fellow Jews dying in European concentration camps. Other Zionist leaders, in the pre- and post-1948 period alike, have been assailed by a new crop of biographers and historians as blind, weak-minded egotists, or as callous politicians who chose to forgo every opportunity for peace with the Arabs and thereby condemned successive generations of Israelis to needless war and death.

In the yearning for peace, for a normal human existence, *homo democraticus* in Israel has thus begun to turn on himself. Young Israelis in particular tend to imagine their future in much more individualistic terms than was the case even a few years ago. The army has been hit with an unusually heavy wave of draft resisters, and the lack of motivation among those who serve is notable. If peace has come, why should I be the last to die?, is the not unreasonable question a soldier on guard patrol might put to himself before being overpowered by an attack of Hezbollah or Islamic Jihad. In the absence of a deeply internalized rationale—such as was provided in the past by Zionist ideology—why, indeed?

One can, of course, hardly blame Israelis for deciding that peace is now at hand, or that it has already arrived. Not only have they been fighting, and fighting, and fighting, for over 50 years now, but in that fight they have frequently found themselves patronized and condemned by the democratic West. Today more than ever, many Europeans and Americans find it difficult to accept that Israel's situation remains precarious and vulnerable—or that, not least when it comes to the struggle against Islamic extremism, its prospects

remain tied to the prospects of liberal democracy itself. No wonder that many Israelis, weary to the bone, and highly sensitized to Western liberal opinion, are as eager as anyone to believe that the war is over.

Israel today suggests a terrible paradox of democracy—namely, that only an active state of war may be capable of inspiring in free citizens the self-sacrificing values necessary to defend and preserve a

system designed above all for peace. On the ability of this tiny and long-suffering country to resolve that paradox may depend not only its own future, but a good part of the West's as well.

The Ghosts of Vietnam

Charles Horner

IN THE last ten years, Vietnam has come awkwardly back into ordinary international life, obliged by the profound changes that have taken place in the world to shed its pose of defiant isolation.

Before 1945, Vietnam had all the allure of an emerging modern culture, with something cosmopolitan and something French added to its far older East and South Asian traditions. These tantalizing prospects were soon to be buried, unable to survive in either a garrison or a police state. For 30 years of war between 1945 and 1975, and for at least a decade thereafter, Vietnam became a country that prided itself on drabness and austerity, and seemed determined never again to become enticing.

As we now know, the Vietnamese had among the worst of all Communist experiences. True, Central Europeans were forced to endure the horrors of Stalinist rule, but their own young were not sent off on decades of quixotic and self-destructive military adventures. Even when compared to China and North Korea during their periods of high madness, Communist Vietnam seemed driven by a particularly demonic energy which ended by destroying millions of hapless subjects through war and repression. Only the Cambodians fared worse.

So, if we are now beginning to see some stirring of normality in

Vietnam—a new receptivity to international commerce, a bit of cultural creativity, an embryonic human-rights movement of a sort once commonplace in Central Europe—the first wonder, as in Dr. Johnson's old phrase, is not that the thing is being done well, but that it is being done at all. A second thought also occurs: to judge by recent literary works, we may be witnessing in Vietnam a human analogue to the reappearance of flora in forests once totally devastated by fire and given up for lost.

Novel Without a Name by Duong Thu Hong* and *The Sorrow of War* by Bao Ninh† have appeared in English at almost the same moment; but they have more in common than that circumstance alone. Their authors, both now in their late forties, were close witnesses to the phase of the Indochina wars that ended in 1975. Miss Duong was a young theatrical performer, a member of a youth brigade sent to the front to boost the morale of North Vietnam's first-line combatants. Bao Ninh was an actual fighter, one whose 500-man infantry brigade had melted away to ten survivors by war's end. Each writer, by virtue of these credentials, could have enjoyed an honored existence in post-1975 Vietnam; but each opted otherwise.

Duong Thu Hong's experience is perhaps the more complex, and not only because she happens to be a woman. Her first efforts as a

writer in the late 1980's seem to have been the products of a kind of "hundred flowers" thaw. Embarking on a policy of economic liberalization, the regime appealed for the support of disenchanted intellectuals by permitting a relaxation in cultural policy. But, as in the Soviet Union and China in earlier generations, the regime got more than it bargained for.

We do not know all the stages in Miss Duong's process of deconversion but, by the end of the decade, she had published three novels, all depicting Vietnamese society in bitter terms. *Paradise of the Blind* (1988; English edition 1993) is the only one of these well-known in the West; it is the story of a young woman who has served as one of the tens of thousands of Vietnamese "export workers" in the Soviet Union and whose disillusionment comes about through close observation of post-1975 Vietnam's "new class."

Duong Thu Hong's novels were at first acclaimed but, in a pattern reminiscent of what happened to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn after the publication in 1962 of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, they eventually got her expelled from the Communist party. In 1991, she spent several months under arrest. Her writings now occupy a kind of no-man's-land, not formally banned, not freely available, either.

* Translated by Phan Huy Duong and Nina McPherson. Morrow. 292 pp. \$23.00.

† Translated by Phan Thanh Hao. Pantheon. 233 pp. \$21.00.

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From all this comes *Novel Without a Name*, a work more powerful than Miss Duong's earlier ones and the first to deal with the master subject of her time, the Vietnam war. It is a first-person account, told by a man, and thus marks a significant departure from her earlier works with their woman's perspective.

The young narrator has seen a decade of war. "Ten years ago," he reminisces, "we had wanted to sing songs of glory. Anything was good for killing, as long as it brought us glory." Now, war comes back to him in dreams, in hallucinations, in visions of walking vultures that remind him of "villages razed to ash, strewn with swollen corpses, of the gorges that swam with blood and rotting flesh; of the stench of death, the buzzing of flies."

How the narrator arrives from then to now is the burden of Miss Duong's story. One moment in particular stands out: during a train ride in wartime Vietnam, our narrator, then a soldier, overhears the chatter of two high-ranking officials, out to see how the masses are living. As they muse about what is required to extract a greater effort from this "nation of imbeciles," who "need a religion to guide them and a whip to educate them," the young man has a political epiphany. He sees himself as a marionette, held like countless others in the thrall of a malign puppeteer:

Billions of lives wait for the signal to jump into the fire, into hell. . . . I am one of them, they are my kin, all those who are dear to me. . . . And seated behind this curtain, I see this little man with his pug nose, grinning, puffing on a cigarette.

Duong Thu Hong's telling of her tale is skillful, immersing us fully in the scary, the repulsive, and the grotesque. Crossing easily between the real and the surreal, her novel draws on traditional Vietnamese conventions of storytelling in which the line between the animate and the inanimate is often blurred, in which trees and rocks and machines have living innards—souls, as it were—that can and do separate themselves from their hosts.

Similarly blurred in much traditional Vietnamese literature, in

a manner exploited by Miss Duong here, is the line between life and death. As in Chinese opera, Japanese Noh, or Javanese puppet theater, death is not the end of things: there is a relation between our present life and "other" life that is part and parcel of the nature of the world. Whether or not Miss Duong actually believes in these notions, they provide her with a resonant way of interpreting novelistically the last 50 years of Vietnamese history, especially when it comes to depictions of battle and war.

They also provide her with the structureless structure of her book. The story she tells does not have a beginning, a middle, or an end in the normal sense, for in and of themselves the war experiences she recounts rob us of any workaday apprehension of the rational ordering of things. As readers, we become guerrilla fighters: advancing and retreating, withdrawing and reflecting, regrouping and rearming, all the while losing any sense of what the war we are fighting is or was ever about.

BAO NINH's *The Sorrow of War* is in many respects a close sibling of the story told in *Novel Without a Name*, and it is remarkably similar in the feeling it evokes and the manner in which it evokes it. Even its publishing history is analogous. Once again, the Hanoi regime took a while to realize what this book was "really" about. When first published, it circulated widely throughout the country, but it is now under a de-facto interdict—not officially proscribed, not reprintable.

The title does not mislead: this is indeed a sorrow-filled tale of "thirty years of war . . . so many lives, so many fates." The narrator and the few survivors of his brigade were among those present in Saigon on April 30, 1975, the last day of the war. But, as he recalls the event years afterward, even at the time they did not experience that soaring and brilliant happiness they would later see depicted in films about the fall of the city. In part, this book represents the author's effort to comprehend why that should be so.

Unlike *Novel Without a Name*,

The Sorrow of War is very much a writer's book, and indeed one of its *leitmotifs* concerns the way it has itself come to be composed—the narrator tells of discovering a manuscript which, in addition to containing the story we are now reading, also includes reflections on how the story was created. This self-conscious, perhaps too self-conscious introspection substitutes in the novel for any overtly political discussion. In Bao Ninh's version of the Vietnam war, Communists and Americans alike are confined to an almost arbitrary invisibility.

With politics in the background, the foreground is filled with pretty rough stuff. Even by the conventions of war novels, *The Sorrow of War* is horribly graphic: things which catch fire really burn, and nothing is spared either verbally or emotionally in conveying what happens when superheated metal, propelled from guns at very high speeds, collides with human flesh.

In Bao Ninh's hands the sorrow of war encompasses as well the sorrow of love. Central to his story is a matter of the heart: the unsummated love of the narrator and his high-school sweetheart. It is only after their failed postwar reunion that we learn the harrowing tale of how they were separated. The young woman had followed her lover on his way to the front, only to lose him at the last moment. Although she lives out the war in safety, she, like him, suffers the destruction of any capacity for normal life and love. They are, each of them, casualties twice over, and when the irreparable force of this fact is brought home to the narrator of Bao's book, it has all the impact on him—and on his readers—that the encounter with the new Vietnam's cynical officials has on the narrator of *Novel Without a Name*.

INDEED, this beautiful young woman—enchanted, daring, poignantly resigned to her fate—is in a sense a connecting thread between the two novels: one can readily imagine her surviving the war to become, years later, the disillusioned heroine of *Paradise of the Blind*, and then the author of *Novel Without a Name* itself. But it is that

shared quality of seemingly stoical acceptance which deserves another moment's reflection.

The survivors who narrate these two books seem the very embodiment of a near-stereotypical Asian stolidity in the face of adversity. But we should not be misled by the apparent impassiveness of Duong Thu Hong and Bao Ninh into thinking that the anger they share with their compatriots has been exhausted. Throughout the centuries, Vietnamese have taken delight in tales of the many ways

those wrongfully injured in this world are able to turn the tables on their tormentors, even if they must return from the next world in order to do it. In life, the aggrieved may be powerless, unable to harm anyone; but "dead and vengeful," in the words of one 17th-century tale, "they are suffused with power and danger. A hungry ghost can roam the village for generations, impossible to placate, impossible to exorcise."

Both these books are filled with the ghosts and spirits of people

deeply wronged. So the politicians in today's Hanoi who are taking steps to suppress such works know what they are doing. These politicians, after all, are as familiar with the traditional stories as are the humblest peasants: the stories of evil generals, corrupt ministers, and lecherous officials who brutalize the poor, conscript their sons, despoil their daughters, and engage in vainglorious imperial expeditions. The vengeful spirits always rise up, and always return, and always exact retribution.

Music

"Harvey Milk," Etc.

Terry Teachout

Harvey Milk, an opera by Stewart Wallace and Michael Korie about the life and violent death of America's first openly gay elected public official, premiered in Houston earlier this year and made its debut at the New York City Opera in April. It is not the first opera about a homosexual to be presented by a major American house; that distinction belongs to Benjamin Britten's *Death in Venice*, which received its Metropolitan Opera premiere in 1974. But *Harvey Milk* is the first large-scale opera to reflect explicitly an important new cultural development: homosexuality, once a

comparatively shadowy aspect of the world of opera, has now taken a place of honor at center stage.

THERE have always been homosexuals in and around opera, and it seems probable that they have always been "overrepresented" there (to borrow a term from the lexicon of affirmative action) in much the same way they have been "overrepresented" in the world of theater as a whole. Similarly, there has long been a cult of opera among many homosexual men (and among a surprisingly large number of lesbians). Nevertheless, unlike ballet, opera has not been widely viewed as an art form dominated by homosexuals. Nor, at least in cities large enough to support an opera company, is listening to or attending opera considered anything out of the ordinary.

In recent years, however, this has begun to change. Prior to World War II, only one important opera composer, Tchaikovsky, was homosexual, and then hardly in a public way; since 1945, most composers who have specialized in opera have been gay, including Britten, Gian Carlo Menotti, Hans Werner Henze, and Michael Tippett, the four leading figures of the pre-minimalist postwar era. And with their increased public acceptance, homosexuals now also occupy more conspicuously high-profile positions in the institutional world of opera than ever before, from agents to directors to conductors to critics.

Not surprisingly, the public impression of opera lovers has also begun to change. The stereotype of the "opera queen" (the homosexual slang term for a gay man

TERRY TEACHOUT reviewed *Edward Rothstein's Emblems of Mind: The Inner Life of Music and Mathematics in our June 1995 issue. His most recent book is A Second Mencken Chrestomathy (Knopf).*

who loves opera obsessively) first became familiar and, so to say, domesticated through Terrence McNally's *The Lisbon Traviata* (1989), a play about two gay men who prefer opera to life. In 1993, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*, a book by an English professor at Yale, Wayne Koestenbaum, received much favorable attention for its rhapsodic description of the opera-queen mentality.

Given these developments, it is logical that opera on stage would itself eventually reflect the growing offstage influence of homosexuals—and that this change, when it came, would constitute a drastic departure from traditional norms of operatic content.

THE subject matter of opera is and always has been dominated by portrayals of heterosexual love; virtually every pre-1945 repertory opera is in some fundamental sense a love story. The monopoly of this theme was first systematically broken by Britten, most of whose operas are about persecution, not love. Several librettos set by Britten contain homosexual symbolism, and two, *The Turn of the Screw* (1954) and *Death in Venice* (1973), deal more or less straightforwardly with the subject of pederasty (Britten suffered throughout his adult life from pedophilia urges).

Other homosexual composers, too, have experimented with thematic material not obviously related to the standard boy-meets-girl/girl-dies axis around which traditional opera revolves. They include Menotti in *The Medium* (1945) and *The Consul* (1949), and Virgil Thomson in *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) and *The Mother of Us All* (1947); both Thomson operas had librettos by Gertrude Stein. But what had heretofore been missing from the stages of major opera houses was a work with an explicitly homosexual theme presented in unabashedly pro-homosexual terms. That gap has now been filled with *Harvey Milk*.

Milk is an iconic figure among American homosexuals. In 1969, at the age of thirty-nine, he "came out of the closet" and moved from New York, where he had been

working on Wall Street, to San Francisco. There he became a popular figure in the local gay community, entered politics, and in 1977 ran successfully for city supervisor. Another supervisor, Dan White, an ex-fireman enraged by Milk's homosexuality and obsessed with his political triumphs, shot him and Mayor George Moscone to death at City Hall in 1978. Dianne Feinstein (who is also a minor character in *Harvey Milk*) succeeded Moscone as mayor, subsequently becoming a major figure in California politics; Milk became, and remained, a gay martyr.

This brief outline is the stuff of a gay-pride pageant, which is roughly the form taken by Michael Korie's libretto, up to and including the on-stage candlelight procession with which it concludes. Its suitability for operatic treatment is more problematic. Even the grandest operas are ultimately about private matters: love, betrayal, death. Politicians, by contrast, lead public lives and serve public ends. Accordingly, operas that seek to dramatize the lives of public figures usually do so by focusing on their private conflicts.

The first act of *Harvey Milk*, which tells the story of how Milk (played in both the Houston and New York productions by baritone Robert Orth) came to terms with his sexuality, embodies just such a conflict. To be sure, Korie has stooped to laughably crude symbolism: Milk walks around in handcuffs until he finally meets Mr. Right (with whom he sings a love duet) and dares to risk his Wall Street job by participating in the Stonewall gay-liberation riots, at which precise moment he breaks free. But most opera librettos are notoriously crude—the subtlety, if any, is in the music—and the plot line crafted by Korie is compelling enough to bring the first act to fitful but believable life.

This is not to say that it is unpolitical. On the contrary, like the rest of the opera, it is an exercise in blatant agitprop. "I stand up for myself as a Jew," Milk sings in his first-act aria, one of the many places in the libretto where direct parallels are drawn between the victimization of Jews and the con-

dition of homosexuals in America. "Why not as a man who loves men?" But in this first act Milk still retains the outlines of individuality. Only when his interior conflict is resolved does he cease to be an individual and become a symbol, an idealized stick figure who lives not for love but for politics.

Perhaps it is more exact to say that love and politics are consubstantial in *Harvey Milk*. Milk's lover admits as much when he sings nostalgically of the Stonewall riots: "Just remember that warm night in June./The fire that raged in the street/and the heat inside my heart." He might as well have said that the personal is political, for that is the point of Korie's libretto, in which every imaginable feature of identity politics is placed on stage for the audience to applaud. It is not enough merely to believe that homosexuality is normal in order to buy the last two acts of *Harvey Milk*: one must also be pro-union (the Teamsters supported Milk in his run for City Supervisor), pro-affirmative action, anti-cop, and a registered Democrat.

SUCH is the unpromising material out of which the New York City Opera (along with the Houston Grand Opera) made the best possible production of *Harvey Milk*. Christopher Alden staged the work with exceptional skill and clarity, and Robert Orth gave one of the most vivid operatic portrayals seen in New York in recent years. But Orth, Alden, and their colleagues had next to nothing to work with in the way of memorable music: Stewart Wallace's score (which received a shockingly disorganized performance from Christopher Keene, New York City Opera's general director, and the company's pit orchestra) is little more than an efficient, faceless post-modern pastiche of Stravinsky, film music, and 70's pop, modestly effective as a backdrop for theatrical action but of no independent interest whatsoever. In the end, Michael Korie's leaden words and cartoonish characters are forced to carry the entire dramatic burden of the opera, and they are hopelessly unequal to the task. Particularly

in the last act, *Harvey Milk* collapses under the weight of its own sanctimony.

THOUGH almost entirely unsuccessful as a work of art, *Harvey Milk* does succeed wholly in accomplishing its principal nonartistic goal: putting homosexuality on stage in American opera houses. The question is, can such operas find a large audience?

The fact that all three of *Harvey Milk*'s New York performances were sold out in advance hardly constitutes an answer to this question; controversial new operas can almost always draw crowds if they are heavily publicized, and especially if they are given a limited run. A more pertinent fact is that the Metropolitan Opera's 1994 revival of Britten's *Death in Venice* was a box-office flop, as a result of which plans to repeat the opera the following season were reportedly scrapped. And in the case of *Death in Venice*, unlike *Harvey Milk*, opera and production alike were highly and uniformly distinguished.

Whether this means opera audiences are simply uninterested in watching operas on gay themes is not yet clear—or, rather, not yet fairly tested. The principal trouble with *Harvey Milk* is not that it is a gay opera but that it is a bad opera. *Death in Venice*, by contrast, is much admired by critics, but is composed in a musical idiom that leaves many opera lovers cold, quite apart from the discomfort they may also feel at Britten's relentless focus on the physical allure of a fourteen-year-old boy.

What will happen when and if a first-rate composer and librettist endeavor to tell a politics-free homosexual love story with the uncomplicated musical and theatrical appeal of, say, *La Traviata*? It will be interesting to see. Certainly there has never been a successful big-budget American film of a homosexual love story; in Hollywood, homosexuality works only as a "problem" (as in *Philadelphia*). True, next to film, opera may not be a popular art form, but in a country where state subsidy of the arts is limited, its continued production, too, necessarily depends in the long run on the willingness of the general public to buy tickets.

But even if explicitly gay operas have trouble attracting an audience large enough to make them financially viable, it is unlikely that gay composers and librettists will therefore refrain from writing them, or that opera companies will hesitate to produce them. In the past, major homosexual artists from Tchaikovsky to Tennessee Williams accepted the convention that they had to concentrate primarily (if not exclusively) on the portrayal of heterosexual relationships in order to reach a large public. Such compromises are now regarded as unacceptable by a growing number of younger artists. When the choreographer Mark Morris left ballet (an art form in which male-female partnering is customary) for modern dance (in which such partnering has less priority), he explained: "I got tired of pretending to be a straight guy in love with a ballerina."

As for reasoned critical objections to specific gay operas, these are likely to be ascribed indiscriminately to "homophobia." That, indeed, is the line taken by Stewart Wallace (who is heterosexual) and Michael Korie, who in press interviews blamed opposition to *Harvey Milk* on bigotry. It has been echoed by William M. Hoffman, author of the libretto for John Corigliano's 1991 opera, *The Ghosts of Versailles** (both Hoffman and Corigliano are openly gay). Hoffman has charged critics who described aspects of that opera as "campy" with being homophobic. Whatever else it accomplishes by way of general intimidation, the charge of homophobia is a useful reminder that gay opera is not merely an artistic phenomenon, but a manifestation of our ongoing culture wars, in which aesthetic quality is subordinated to political utility.

So ONE thing is certain: good or bad, gay opera is likely to be with us for some time to come. Both the increasingly homosexual culture of opera and the increasingly politicized culture of homosexuality ensure that it will be treated as a "cutting-edge" phenomenon of impeccable political correctness, one against which skeptical critics will inveigh in vain. As gay protesters like to chant at riots and rallies, "We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!" At least for the short run, opera lovers, too, had better get used to it.

* Reviewed by Samuel Lipman in COMMENTARY, March 1992.

Reading the Mystery

GOD: A BIOGRAPHY. BY JACK MILES.
Knopf. 446 pp. \$27.50.

Reviewed by PAUL JOHNSON

NO SUMMARY of mine can do justice to the richness of this book. Jack Miles, a journalist and former Jesuit who holds a doctorate in Near Eastern languages from Harvard, has conceived the idea, which may not be entirely new but has never before been pursued with such thoroughness, of treating the God of the Bible as a literary character. In his pages, God emerges as a complex and ever-changing personality, the hero of the greatest work of literature in mankind's history, created over hundreds of years by different artists of varying skills.

It is Miles's argument that God changes profoundly in the course of the Bible. The interest of his work—rather, one of its many interests—lies in his exploration of how and why. In a sense, he writes, God ages, like the earth He creates and the human race He designs to possess it.

We see Him first as an immensely energetic being, "as the creator, outside history, prior to it, masterfully setting in motion the heavenly bodies by which historical time will be measured." This is, as it were, a young, adventurous, innovative, and highly imaginative God, hopeful and dynamic, relishing His power to create and design, a muscular God—muscular in mind as well as body—fit for a pictorial epic by Michelangelo. But if that is the God of the beginning, by the end of the Bible we see God as the "ancient of days," white-haired and silent, "looking forward to the end of history from a remote and cloudy throne"—a William Blake sort of God.

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In tracing the ages of God, Miles notes carefully the patterns of His speech. At the very beginning of Genesis, God is so talkative He talks to Himself, for there is no other living thing to hear Him. At other times in the early sections of the Bible, He says a great deal both to Himself and to men. Then comes a gradual decline into silence, a growing taciturnity of which the Book of Job is an important landmark: thereafter, God's speeches are merely recapitulated.

One of the reasons for this growing silence, Miles thinks, is a desire on God's part to become more mysterious. The early, loquacious God is at some pains to reveal Himself. He creates man in His own image precisely so that man may know and understand what monotheism is all about. It is as though God were anxious to talk man through the divine plan, instructing him on how to give satisfaction to his Maker. This early God, remarks Miles, "rarely says of Himself that He is mysterious and more than once implies the opposite." In Deuteronomy, for example, He insists with some asperity that what He tells His people to do is perfectly plain:

Surely this instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" [Deuteronomy 30:11-12]

Later, however, an increasingly silent God deliberately surrounds Himself in mystery. Indeed, the emergence of the God who is part mystery carries beyond the end of the Hebrew Bible and is a critical aspect of early Christianity. Paul, for example, insists that "now we see Him through a glass, darkly" and that only in the next world will we "see Him face to face." The notion that "the ways of God are mysterious" is a very important axiom of Christianity to this day, part comfort, part irritation—and

part theological escapism, too. It helps to explain the emergence of a centralized structure in Christianity, with a powerful hierarchy acting as a mediator and explainer between God and man.

Since the mystery element is much more important in Christian than in Jewish theology, it is ironic, Miles observes, that we see the growth of taciturnity and mystery in God more clearly in the traditional Jewish ordering of the books of the Bible than in the Christian. And this is a good place to note one of the major strengths of *God: A Biography*—namely, Miles's care throughout in distinguishing between the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament, two different arrangements of the same books which themselves reflect the collective personalities of the world's two highest religions.

The Christian Old Testament shifts the great prophetic collections—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets—to the end, leaving in the middle what Miles calls "the books of silence": Job, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. Behind this altered arrangement lies, perhaps, the desire on the part of Christian redactors to create a greater sense of continuity between the Old Testament and the New, which is itself a book of speech, if only by Jesus.

THE bulk of *God: A Biography* is devoted to delineating the variety of roles in which the Bible presents God: creator, destroyer, creator-destroyer, friend of the family, liberator, lawgiver, father, conqueror, executioner, arbiter, restorer, counselor, Holy One, sleeper, recluse, and finally old man, wearied by time. And God is also shown by Miles in His various moods: exhilarated and troubled, puzzled and puzzling, a mere bystander, even altogether absent. Throughout, Miles examines the questions that are raised by the texts: What is it like to be God? Does God fail? Can and does God love? Then, in a final chapter entitled "Does God

Lose Interest?," he offers some general reflections.

In essence, Miles sees the biblical God as a divided being, a case of schizophrenia. In polytheistic religions, the various aspects of divinity are often played by different gods, each of whom embodies a single salient characteristic. In monotheism, by contrast, God has to play all the parts. So He is, or appears to be, a mass of opposites—tender and ruthless, the all-powerful Lord of heaven but also the sorrowing friend of the poor, and so on.

Miles views the Bible as a tragedy—rather like *Hamlet*, the play which inspired him to write this book. Hamlet is trapped within himself. He tries to be at once a ruthless avenger and a scrupulous moralist who argues through all his actions before performing them; in the end, however, he does nothing, and falls victim himself. So it is with the Bible: God's character, being all-inclusive of divinity, is a contradictory one, and He Himself ends by being trapped within its contradictions.

I HAVE said that Miles's book is exceptionally rich and rewarding, and so it is. But it is also an exercise in literary criticism—a reading—and thus has little or nothing to do with theology. One possible reading of the Bible—Miles's reading—makes God a divided character. But is He so in reality?

Whether or not one believes the Bible is divinely inspired, in part or in whole, it is clearly and without doubt a gigantic intellectual effort—a superhuman effort, one might say—by passionate believers to describe in words a Being Who is nevertheless, by His nature, for the most part unknowable and unfathomable, and therefore ultimately indescribable. The myriad aspects of God discussed by Miles—the aging process, the contradictions—merely reflect the human limitations of the men, and possibly the women, who set down the Scriptures. God Himself, however, is not a character in a work of literature, still less a collection of characters warring among themselves: for believers He is a living being, existing in the real

world He has created, and united in His perfections.

Miles's book, therefore, leaves me with two abiding thoughts: admiration for the courage of those who wrote the Bible, a task which by its nature was beyond the power of man alone; and renewed curiosity about the real Being behind the flickering, confusing, often mystifying man-made images of the biblical text.

Wrongs from Rights

THE DEATH OF COMMON SENSE:
HOW LAW IS SUFFOCATING
AMERICA. BY PHILIP K. HOWARD.
Random House. 202 pp. \$18.00.

Reviewed by MARC M. ARKIN

UNTIL recently, the federal government purchased hammers according to a 33-page specification sheet; its Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) required that bricks be labeled a hazardous substance in the workplace. In New York City, which frequently provides the limiting case for such stories, it takes up to two years and over 209 steps to purchase many capital items. The city's attempt to provide much-needed public toilets was derailed because the experimental Parisian-style kiosks could not be made accessible to wheelchairs as required by law. And city rules forbid bus drivers from dislodging coins accidentally wedged in fare boxes, lest the drivers fall prey to the blandishments of a stray quarter.

All these stories—and more—appear in Philip Howard's disquieting book. Howard, a practicing lawyer active in New York City public life for more than twenty years, has accumulated a remarkable litany of governmental folly, bureaucratic ineptitude, and individual foolishness. *The Death of Common Sense* is a lawyer's plain-language brief about the failure of American law, and it has clearly struck a responsive chord, remaining high on the best-seller lists for weeks on end.

The first part of Howard's book is devoted to America's effort to

achieve a risk-free society by eliminating all conceivable dangers from the home, the highway, the environment, the workplace—even from government itself. The second part chronicles our efforts to neutralize disparities of birth and fortune. In the former, Howard takes on overregulation; in the latter, he tackles the evil twin of the regulatory state, the so-called rights revolution.

According to Howard, in the 1960's many academics and policymakers became convinced that the road to a more efficient and equitable society would be paved with more detailed laws. If the laws were clear, they argued, people could obey them more easily; and the more precisely the laws were elaborated, the clearer they would be.

The results of this approach, however, have been exactly the opposite. Law is now too detailed for anyone to know, much less to obey, creating ample room for the very abuses that the increased detail was intended to prevent. Moreover, by burying both government and industry in paperwork, the government's forest of laws and regulations has created enormous transaction costs and imposed a drag on efficiency—in plain language, nothing gets done and it costs a lot of money not to do it.

But as I noted, the proliferation of law is only half of Howard's story; the proliferation of rights fills out the rest. In a particularly telling section, Howard shows how the laudable goals of the civil-rights movement were hijacked to create a new discourse of rights.

Until recently, Howard explains, rights were understood as protections against governmental intrusion into people's lives. This shield, however, has turned somehow into a sword. Individuals and groups use the language of rights to demand benefits from government and society. Now, every American enjoys the right to be free from discrimination based upon any differentiating characteristic; and as a community, we all vie with each other for the prized status of victim.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the workplace. Howard cites a remarkable statistic: 43 million

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Americans fall under the anti-discrimination protections offered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. By my count, that means approximately one in five Americans is qualified to sign up as disabled in some way. The rest, courtesy of other federal statutes, can claim discrimination based upon race, sex, religion, or—if over forty—age. The few who still fail to qualify can always sue their employers for *reverse* discrimination.

Is it any wonder that relations in the workplace are stifled, and our public dialogue focuses not on what we have in common but on what sets us apart?

HOWARD draws a compelling picture of our national problems. This book's undeniable emotive force derives from his overwhelming compilation of anecdotal evidence. Unfortunately, so do its limitations. Already, press reports have surfaced to debunk one or another of his stories. But even if they were all true, it is still the case that he avoids grappling with some of the really hard issues they raise, not to mention the really hard solutions they may require.

Consider, for example, Howard's discussion of federal laws mandating publicly-funded education for children with disabilities. On the one hand, he points to the high cost of these special-education mandates, exemplified by parents who use the law to force local school boards to send disabled children to expensive private schools—in one case, at a cost to taxpayers of \$200,000 a year. On the other hand, he recounts the problems associated with mainstreaming handicapped students into ordinary public-school classes, including higher academic-failure rates for the ostensible beneficiaries of such programs.

If special education is too costly, and mainstreaming too disruptive, what would Howard have us do? Should we abolish the federal mandate and consign the disabled to the private resources of their families? No, says Howard: this would signal a return to the bad old days when the handicapped were closeted away. Instead, his answer is to grant greater flexibility to officials

so that they may exercise common sense in the allocation of resources. But are these not the same administrators who, according to Howard, have given us 33 pages of rules on what to look for in a hammer? *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Who will guard these guardians? It is a question Howard fails to treat.

Howard's inclination to side-step difficult issues creates other odd gaps as well. Who, for instance, is responsible for the mess he so eloquently depicts? Throughout, Howard writes about "law" as if it were a person, and a rather energetic one at that. Thus, law tries "to make sure nothing goes wrong"; law "doesn't respect the idiosyncrasy of human accomplishment"; law "notifies" people who are out of step with its "approved methods."

In Howard's view, "law" seems to have acquired all these nasty habits from consorting with "rationalism," by which he refers to the Enlightenment belief that a perfect government could be modeled rather like a perfect machine. It is "rationalism," he says, that has given us the vain hope of drafting "self-executing" laws to cover every contingency. But that same Enlightenment rationalism also yielded the United States Constitution, a document that has managed to keep us tolerably well-governed for upward of 200 years. And rationalism was also rattling around the American intellectual landscape long before OSHA started declaring that bricks are hazardous to our health.

Howard does, to be sure, offer up a more recent villain: Charles Reich, formerly of Yale University Law School. Most notorious for his 1970 book, *The Greening of America*, Reich is also the author of a 1964 article, "The New Property," which Howard credits with setting off the rights revolution.

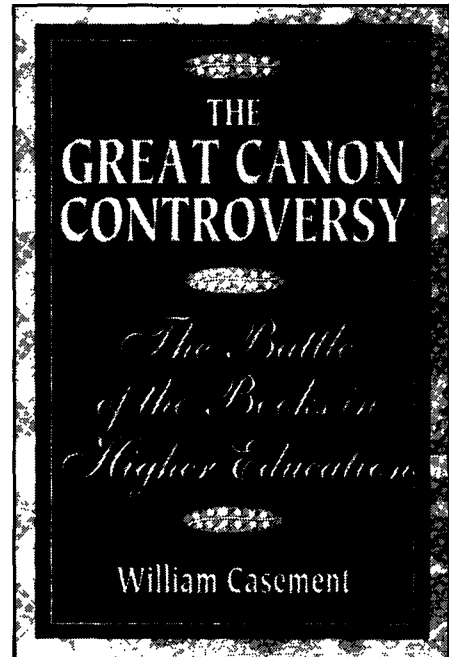
In order to protect individual liberties against government expansion, Reich argued that governmental largesse—welfare payments, broadcasting licenses, teaching positions at public universities, and the like—should be treated as a form of property. Then, government could not act arbitrarily to deprive recipients of

THE GREAT CANON CONTROVERSY

The Battle of the Books in Higher Education

WILLIAM CASEMENT

William Casement provides an illuminating overview of the debate about teaching the great books of Western civilization. He offers a reasoned defense of the canon yet calls for a modification of reading lists to include non-traditional works.



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that largesse without constitutional "due process" of law. According to Howard, under the direct influence of Reich's ideas largesse quickly turned into "entitlement," and the courts got into the business of enforcing a host of new rights on behalf of disgruntled litigants.

Howard's discussion of Reich's article highlights the most striking omission of all in this book: nowhere does he consider the rather obvious fact that America is not only generating more regulations but regulating more things. Worse: in a fundamental paradox, Howard wants to continue this trend. Despite his harsh indictment of the regulatory state and the rights revolution, Howard still wants government to protect workers, watch over the environment, provide education for all children regardless of disability, house the poor, tend to the sick, care for the aged, and make life more comfortable and fairer for everyone. He just wants it to do all these things better than it now does.

Howard appears to believe that with the right laws in place—laws which give more, rather than less, discretion to bureaucrats—government will be restored to competence, and will perform all of its many functions efficiently and well. His vision is thus at once profoundly nostalgic and dangerously activist. *The Death of Common Sense* is eloquent when describing disease; but it not only fails to offer a proper diagnosis, it prescribes a lethal cure.

Odyssey

WITH MY OWN EYES: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A HISTORIAN. BY JACOB KATZ. Translated by ANN BRENNER and ZIPORA BRODY. Brandeis University Press/ University Press of New England. 172 pp. \$29.95.

Reviewed by DAVID BERGER

AS ONE of the most distinguished Jewish historians of the 20th century begins the tenth decade of

DAVID BERGER, here making his first appearance in COMMENTARY, is professor of history at Brooklyn College and at the Graduate School of the City University of New York.

an extraordinarily productive life, this translation of his autobiography provides the English reader with an account of his intellectual, spiritual, and physical odyssey, ranging from the rural Hungary of his birth, to Nazi Germany, to the newborn state of his youthful Zionist dreams. Jacob Katz established his scholarly reputation with *Tradition and Crisis* (Hebrew, 1958; English, 1961), a study of the transition from traditional to early modern Jewish society. Not only does his own experience, recounted here, mirror that transition; his early education in the heartland of Hungarian Orthodoxy gave him the tools to study modernity with a full understanding of what had come before it.

The story of Katz's "yeshiva years" is the often charming account of a rebel with a very small "r." In these pages, Katz chronicles his youthful rejection of the Hungarian yeshiva world's growing intolerance both of secular education and of the burgeoning Zionist movement—while also making a point of his fundamental loyalty to the religious culture in which he had been raised.

In 1928, at the age of twenty-three, Katz left Hungary for a yeshiva in Frankfurt. Officially, secular learning was encouraged in his new environment, and Zionist affirmations, though frowned upon, were openly tolerated. But secular education really does have its dangers, and in his description of these years in Germany, when he also enrolled in a university, Katz affords us a brief glimpse into an inner world of religious doubt.

Other students, he says, were disturbed by "a sense of contradiction between the Jewish tradition by which they lived and the scientific concepts and universal values encountered during their academic studies." He himself, however, was bothered not by this conflict but by his intuition that Judaism—withstanding the prevailing conception in his circles of a system fixed and immutable since the revelation on Mt. Sinai—had undergone a process of development over the centuries. In other words, he was tormented by a sense of history. He confronted this di-

lemma with a theory which offered both inner respite and intellectual stimulation: Judaism had indeed evolved historically, but it had done so by elaborating upon elements that were already immanent in its earlier stages.

It was no easy task for a Jew to complete a doctorate in Germany after the Nazis came to power. Katz took his final oral examination on July 31, 1934, the last day of the last semester a Jewish student would have been permitted to do so and one day before the key Jewish professor on his dissertation committee was dismissed. Upon arriving soon thereafter in Palestine, doctorate in hand, he naively presented himself to the Hebrew University in the vain hope of obtaining a position. Even a reader familiar with the situation at the time cannot fail to be struck by the names of all the distinguished senior Jewish scholars who, as Katz quickly discovered, were then teaching in high schools or, at best, in religiously sponsored teachers' colleges.

And so, in his early thirties, after marrying the woman to whom he had been engaged in Europe, one of the great Jewish scholars of our time took a job teaching geography, botany, and other secular subjects to pre-teenagers in a religious school. Shortly thereafter he secured a post in a new teachers' college where he developed a reputation, almost against his will, as an authority on psychology and pedagogy; on the side, he wrote what quickly became a standard high-school textbook in Jewish history. Finally, in the academic year 1949-50, Jacob Katz entered the Hebrew University at the age of forty-five.

THE rest is history—social history, legal history, economic history, religious history, institutional history, intellectual history, political history. In his many books and articles, Katz has penetratingly elucidated a dazzling spectrum of significant movements, and moments, in medieval and modern Jewish life. The development of a "semi-neutral" and "neutral society" in early modern times; the distinction between traditional and Orthodox communities; the differ-

ence between a society marked by occasional deviation from a norm and one where the norm itself has broken down; the social functions of ostensibly pietistic organizations; the method for uncovering or questioning the existence of unstated motivations in legal decisions by rabbis—these and many other fundamental insights are a part of Katz's legacy to Jewish scholarship.

His academic reputation, he says, was consolidated first by *Tradition and Crisis* and then by his second book, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Hebrew, 1960; English, 1961). While this autobiography is not intended as a guide to Katz's scholarly work, it does help to illuminate the personal side not only of the historical processes analyzed in the former book, to which I alluded at the outset, but of the religious tensions addressed in the latter.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Jewish spokesmen to the outside world had tended, somewhat defensively, to emphasize the universalist elements in the tradition, citing rabbinic texts that spoke of the obligation upon Jews to support the non-Jewish poor, that guaranteed a portion in the world-to-come for righteous Gentiles, and so forth. By contrast, in *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* Katz focused on ancient texts which reflected a less tolerant strand in the tradition, and then scrutinized the shifting perspectives from which medieval and modern authorities confronted them.

As he reports proudly here, his analysis did not succumb to apologetics, and the book was indeed a pathbreaking discussion of how Jewish legists responded to changing historical circumstances. In it, as well as in his later study, *The Shabbos Goy* (Hebrew, 1983; English, 1989), Katz avoided the facile assertion that the law was simply qualified or neutralized through clever casuistry whenever observance of it became inconvenient. Rather, he demonstrated how a complex interaction of text, tradition, economic need, ritual instinct, and moral sensitivity shaped a legal system that combined dynamism with loyal adherence to sanctified norms.

The choice of topic in *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* demonstrated not only Katz's interest in the evolution of Jewish law but his own concern with the relationship between Judaism and universal values. In many ways the hero of the book is Rabbi Menahem ha-Meiri of Perpignan (late-13th, early-14th centuries), who developed an approach to the law that virtually exempted contemporary Christians and Muslims from discriminatory norms which the Talmud had applied to non-Jews. If Katz's analysis of ha-Meiri was honest and perceptive, both his interest and his orientation were molded by concerns that emerged from the core of his own spiritual quest as at once a modern and a traditional Jew.

With My Own Eyes makes only fleeting reference—and sometimes no reference at all—to a number of Katz's later seminal works. Among those worth singling out as most familiar to American readers are *Out of the Ghetto* (1973), a mature treatment of the issues addressed in his doctoral dissertation, and *From Prejudice to Destruction:*

Anti-Semitism 1700-1933 (1980), a fundamental analytical survey of another subject which profoundly affected his life. And of course Katz is well known to readers of *COMMENTARY*, to which he has contributed essays on Jewish religious and social history for decades.

AS THE story of a life, this book is marked by considerable emotional reserve. Still, there are moments when the spare narrative affords glimpses into a reservoir of passionate feeling: the impact upon a youthful student in Pressburg of a lecture given by a visiting religious-Zionist leader; a hushed moonlight walk along the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem during Katz's first Passover in Palestine; a trip to Cyprus for a round of exhausting but exhilarating teaching at a camp for Holocaust survivors.

In one particularly wrenching but characteristically quiet passage, we learn a little more about a young member of the Katz family to whom we have been only fleetingly introduced before. Katz is recalling that in the early days of

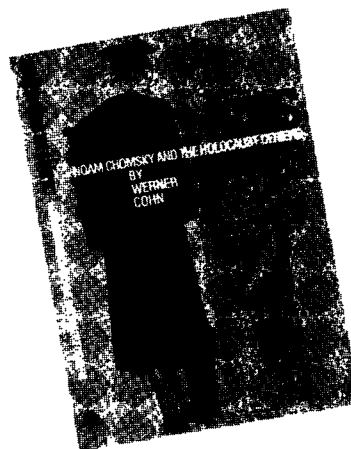
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— Nathan Glazer, Author of
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the state, as war raged, he had told a colleague that all the residents of Israel would have to be prepared for the ultimate sacrifice. He goes on:

Shortly thereafter, a bomb landed behind our house, where three children from the building were playing. Our son David was lightly wounded, but his friend Reuben Halbertal and our eight-year-old daughter Havah—as charming a little girl as could be—were killed. When that same colleague from the college came to offer his condolences . . . , I told him: “I was trapped by my own words; I accepted the divine sentence even before I knew it.”

THIS memoir, combined with Jacob Katz’s prolific scholarly work, puts on display an unusual constellation of personal and professional qualities, qualities that one might be tempted to regard as self-contradictory: piety and openness; passion and objectivity; breadth and focus; methodological innovativeness and traditional learning; wit and deep seriousness; a critical spirit and a gift for friendship. In his final sentence, Katz expresses his gratitude “to Him who measures out the life span of all life” for having granted him so many productive years. So should we all.

The Vision Thing

NEWTON’S OPTICAL WRITINGS. BY DENNIS L. SEPPER. *Rutgers*. 217 pp. \$42.00.

Reviewed by DAVID GUASPARI

CAN there be more than anti-quarian interest in scientific works that have long been superseded? To judge by their actions, most contemporary scientists would answer no. Few modern-day chemists have read the works of Antoine Lavoisier, the founder of their subject. Few physicists have read Isaac Newton. *Masterworks of Discovery*, however, a series of “guided studies of great texts in science,” answers with an emphatic yes.

Harvey Flaumenhaft, the general editor of the series, argues the importance of understanding

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where we are by the light of where we have been. Science feeds on questions, and in the normal course, he writes, “new questions are built from the answers that were given to the old questions”; but then

the old questions are . . . no longer asked. . . . Progress thus can lead to a kind of forgetfulness, making us less thoughtful in some ways than those whom we go beyond.

As a result, he warns, we may easily become prisoners of second-hand or ready-made opinions:

Only by actively taking part in discovery—only by engaging in rediscovery ourselves—can we avoid both blind reaction to the scientific enterprise and blind submission to it.

In *Newton’s Optical Writings*, one of the early volumes in the series, Dennis L. Sepper also emphasizes the pleasures of encountering first-rate work of any time or place. He compares scientific art to literary art. Great poems, he writes,

not only stand up to intensive scrutiny, they positively invite it and reveal remarkable density and texture to those who take them to heart. Great scientific works are much the same.

One might add that historical works like this one also provide the layman with a rare practical chance to understand work “on the frontier”; to see real science in action; and to follow the plot when much is in doubt and much at stake.

SEPPER’s guidebook to Newton’s optics is straightforwardly organized. It contains a brief account of Newton’s life; a description of prevailing theories of optics in the 17th century and the controversies aroused by Newton’s findings; appendices with technical details and suggestions for further reading; and, interleaved with commentary, two of Newton’s works that bracket his scientific career: his letter to the Royal Society (1672) and the *Opticks* (1704). The letter is Newton’s first publication. Sepper calls it the first great instance of a now-familiar genre—the journal article. The *Opticks* is Newton’s last major scientific work.

In Newton’s day, optics was an exemplary mathematical science. One of its great achievements was the discovery of a law for refraction, which permits us to explain the workings of things like lenses in telescopes, microscopes, and the human eye. This law, which Sepper explains in detail, amounts to a way of quantifying light’s refrangibility, its tendency to bend when passing from one medium, such as water, to another, such as air.

Newton’s letter begins with an account of simple observations of refraction that pose a complex puzzle. He examines the image projected onto a screen by sunlight after it has passed through a circular hole in a window shade and then been refracted by a glass prism. Newton goes out of his way *not* to discuss the most striking aspect of this image—that the seemingly colorless beam of sunlight has been somehow transformed into a rainbow’s band of colors. Instead, he calls our attention to the image’s shape, an oval five times longer than it is wide.

Now, received theories of optics in the 17th century implied that the image resulting from such a procedure would be *circular*, because a prism would bend all the rays composing the initial, circular beam of light by the same amount. Newton’s account, proceeding like a detective story, arrives at a radical explanation. The oval is formed because sunlight is not a homogeneous substance but is composed of rays of many different kinds, each following the law of refraction but each having a different refrangibility.

This conclusion transforms optics from a geometric account of the patterns of light rays to an experimental investigation of the physical nature of light. Light becomes a substance. Along the way, Newton proposes an equally radical theory of color.

Sepper discusses not only the logic of Newton’s argument, but also the look and feel of his scientific experimentation. If we attempt to reproduce Newton’s observations, what we see comes as a surprise. The puzzling image with which Newton’s discussion begins is not the oval which he reports

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and which, in strict logic, his theory implies, but is actually pear-shaped. Do we say that he cooked the books or that he merely exercised his judgment?

Newton seems to have decided that the elongation of the image was a significant phenomenon requiring explanation, while the deviation from a strict oval shape could be disregarded, at least provisionally. While that decision has justified itself by its scientific fruitfulness, Newton's idealized description of the image as an oval did not have entirely happy results. Sepper suggests that some of the scientific opposition to Newton's optical findings can be explained by this inaccuracy, which made it impossible to reproduce the experiment precisely as described.

WHILE Newton's letter is an elegant miniature, his *Opticks* is shot in cinemascope: deepening and broadening the experimental account of optical phenomena and color, and outlining a speculative theory that would integrate these explanations within the framework he had earlier used with such brilliant success to account for gravitation and planetary motion. The conclusion of the *Opticks* presents a research program, an extended sequence of questions that suggest how optical phenomena could be used to study the ultimate constitution of matter. It also provides a glimpse of how Newton's "Method of Analysis"—a process of inductive argument "from Experiment and Observation" that, he believed, freed scientists from reliance on untestable "Hypotheses"—might permit progress toward a unified account of the fundamental laws of nature.

Newton's conclusion, presented in a famous passage that takes seriously the interrelatedness of all knowledge, is appropriately grand:

[I]f Natural Philosophy . . . by pursuing this Method, shall at length be perfected, the Bounds of Moral Philosophy will also be enlarged. For so far as we can know by Natural Philosophy what is the first Cause, what Power he has over us, and what Benefits we receive from him, so far our duty toward him, as well

as that toward one another, will appear to us by the Light of Nature. . . .

With clichés ruling our own public discussions of science—from the boosterism that confuses science with the pursuit of useful technology, to self-satisfied displays of feeling good about feeling bad about pollution and the atomic bomb—Sepper's unpretentious guidebook is timely. It invites discussion that is serious and, by summoning us back to Newton's texts, helps us to recall something we knew, or should have known, all along. Great scientific works are of enduring interest for their passionate attention to the phenomenal world, for their daring and imagination, and, not least, for chronicling the exploits of great heroes of the life of the human mind.

About-Face

THE NEXT AMERICAN NATION: THE NEW NATIONALISM AND THE FOURTH AMERICAN REVOLUTION. BY MICHAEL LIND. *Free Press*. 415 pp. \$22.95.

Reviewed by GEORGE WEIGEL

THIS past winter, Michael Lind, erstwhile research assistant to William F. Buckley, Jr., quondam contributor to *COMMENTARY*, the *Public Interest*, and *National Review*, former executive editor of the *National Interest*, and now a senior editor at the *New Republic*, took to the pages of *Dissent* to justify his defection from the ranks of the "corrupt" conservative intellectuals, whom he pilloried as court theologians to a movement suffering from brain-death.

Whatever else could be said about it, Lind's *apologia pro vita sua* was not a serious piece of intellectual work. It was, rather, a screed, and one whose venom seemed particularly aroused by religious conservatives and anyone who had anything good to say about them. Now, in Lind's first

full-length book, the sniper fire against his former conservative colleagues, mentors, and benefactors continues. But the tone is rather more muted, as befits a volume whose ambition is no less than to limn "the only . . . America in which you and your descendants would want to live."

That America is, in Lind's phrase, a "liberal-nationalist" one. At the end of his 415 pages, the nationalism is reasonably clear, the liberalism considerably less so.

The Next American Nation, which seems to be the product of voluminous reading married to a paucity of quotidian political experience, is three books rolled into one. The first consists of a self-consciously provocative recasting of American history, now read through the prism of class analysis. In this exercise, two of Lind's methodological heroes are figures from the 1920's, the quirky economist Thorstein Veblen and the progressivist historian Charles Beard.

Peering through their spectacles, Lind demotes Thomas Jefferson (a "proponent of pseudo-scientific racism, white supremacy, states' rights, and anti-industrial agrarianism"), James Madison (a relatively inconsequential figure), and Abraham Lincoln (a "railroad lawyer" to whom we "have falsely attributed the color-blind ideal") from the national pantheon, and replaces them with Alexander Hamilton, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Frederick Douglass. More significantly, he undertakes to repudiate the notion that the United States is a distinctive "proposition country," forged, formed, and sustained by a set of moral and political-philosophical convictions; in its place he offers an economic reading of the national story in which the pursuit of the main chance is taken to be the national passion, and class conflict the key social dynamic.

Lind's second book engages today's debate over who and what is an American. It includes a biting critique of racial and ethnic gerrymandering, for which he would substitute a governmentally-driven effort to create a new American nationality. The latter is to be

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achieved by, in effect, exploiting the class conflict that already (allegedly) exists. Lind prescribes a "constant churning of the social classes, abetted by a radical (and race-neutral) restructuring of the political, economic, and educational orders"; this, we are assured, will end in the formation of the "Trans-American," a creature fabricated by means of "universal miscegenation and upward class-leveling, race-blending, and class-blurring."

The statism implicit in this vision is spelled out in Lind's third book, in which he sketches the contours of the future to which we shall be led by the massive intervention of the federal government into virtually every nook and cranny of American life. In Lind's 21st century, Washington would not only enforce a public square naked of religious values, it would actively promote a national ethic of "civil familism." Federal power would also ensure that the benefits of technological change are spread across the population by an "unsubtle, crude, old-fashioned redistribution of wealth, through taxation and public spending." (Lind's fertile imagination proposes a massive program of "voucher capitalism" in which "citizens [will be] given consumption vouchers not only for basic necessities like housing and transportation but for amenities like recreation and entertainment.") The giver of all these good gifts being the central government, Lind concedes that, in his brave new world, "the very distinction between the 'public' and 'private' sectors might become blurred." Indeed.

PERHAPS the most obvious and glaring weakness of *The Next American Nation* as a piece of analysis is that it is so desperately out of touch with the country its author wants to remake. Which is to say, this book seems to have been written about a different society from the one that voted as it did last November. To tell Americans that they are undertaxed is, perhaps, a bold move; to call for a massive expansion of state power on behalf of the beleaguered middle class, at precisely the moment the middle

class has turned against the nanny state with a vengeance, is beyond recklessness and off into fantasy land. Anyone who seriously believes that what is "alienating an ever-growing number of Americans from the political process" is our current patterns of campaign finance, or the fact that Kansas has as many U.S. Senators as California, has been spending too much time with the books and not enough time with the folks (or the exit polls).

As for Lind's fondness for class analysis, no doubt the dynamics of class do illuminate certain aspects of contemporary American public life (as, for example, the gap in world view between country-club Republicans and religiously-motivated social conservatives). But class analysis has always been an especially crude brush for painting a portrait of the American people. Writing in the *New Republic* the very week Michael Lind's name first appeared on that magazine's masthead, James Q. Wilson noted that "even the most liberal

Americans are tolerant of income differences that would appall a conservative Swede." And both history and present-day survey research consistently indicate that Americans have never been enamored of massive schemes of income redistribution.

Here, Lind's war against the notion of America as a "proposition country" drives him into an analytic cul-de-sac. Americans *are* different, and not least in their attitude toward economic egalitarianism, which is why the essentially European cancer of socialism has never really metastasized here. Yet if, like Lind, you are hell-bent on arguing that the American experience of nationality has not given rise to a distinctive set of political values, then you are inevitably going to miss a great many things about the United States and its singular form of the democratic experiment.

One of those things concerns the place of religion in American life. Here, Lind's aversion to the politically-engaged religious conservatives

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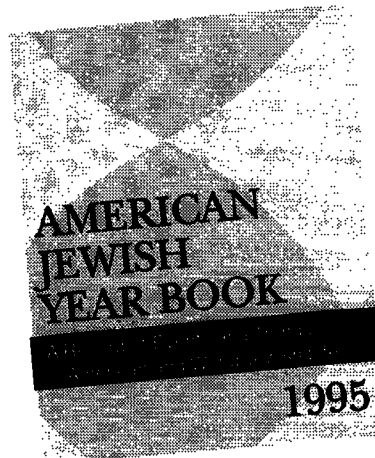
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leads to both empirical misunderstanding and a false set of options for the future.

On the empirical side, Lind thinks he sees an accelerating pattern of religious indifferentism in this country; Americans, he argues, have adopted the henotheism of "one God and many equally true religions." But the phenomenon Lind is trying to describe could much more accurately be thought of as a flourishing of religious tolerance—and one, moreover, that is morally grounded in religious convictions. Tens of millions of Americans believe that they are religiously obligated to engage their theological differences through the arts of persuasion, rather than through coercion.

Blind to this historic accomplishment of American culture, Lind sees but two options before us: an establishment of secularism on the one hand, a religious civil war on the other. It is to avoid these extremes that he champions the naked public square.

But as 50 years of Supreme Court jurisprudence ought to have made plain, the judicial and bureaucratic enforcement of the naked public square has already resulted in the de-facto establishment of a secularist, indeed an anti-theist, public creed—itself a far more powerful engine of the American people's alienation from

government than campaign-finance laws. Committed as he is to government rather than to civil society as the engine of American reform, Lind misses the real alternative to war by other means: namely, the development of a genuine pluralism in which differences are neither ignored nor demeaned but engaged, civilly, by men and women of faith and toleration.

THERE are many causal factors that help explain the current moribund state of American liberalism. Despite everything else that is wrong with his book, Michael Lind is surely right in arguing that the liberal abandonment of the principle of color-blind equality, and liberalism's embrace of the sundry idiocies of multiculturalism, are among them. He may also be right—I happen to think he is—in his intuition that the American people are in a genuinely revolutionary mood. But—to repeat—the object of their animus is the same central government whose powers he would vastly expand.

There is something else going on here, though, besides the fact that Michael Lind and others of his newfound friends on the Left are rather dramatically out of touch with contemporary American society. For the hard truth of the matter is that these critics do

not quite trust that society, or the people who compose it, to do the right thing. One of the most powerful political ideas at work in the United States today is the rediscovery of civil society as the foundation of a stable democracy—the recovery of Tocqueville's insight that American freedom is secured by a moral culture formed and sustained by voluntary communities of common memory and mutual aid (in Mary Ann Glendon's phrase). Like other forms of Left-leaning political thought, Lind's "liberal nationalism" not only seems to have missed this welcome development entirely; it is in thrall to manipulative and statist impulses of a much darker and less savory sort.

What Lind calls "the fourth American revolution" is really the blueprint for a Second American Reconstruction. Like those who managed the post-Civil War Reconstruction of the South, he evinces little confidence in the arts of persuasion, and much faith in the obtuseness, greed, and orneriness of those to be reconstructed. And while Michael Lind never quite comes clean about it, the path to his "Trans-America" necessarily involves legal and political coercion on a scale that would have brought a blush to the cheek of many another avatar of 20th-century corporatism.



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